

AN EXAMINATION OF SAMHAIN AND BELTANE RITUALS IN
CONTEMPORARY PAGAN PRACTICE

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A Thesis

In

The Department

Of

Religion

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (History and Philosophy of Religion) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April, 2006

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ISBN: 0-494-14198-0
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ISBN: 0-494-14198-0

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ABSTRACT**An Examination of Samhain and Beltane Rituals in Contemporary Pagan Practice****Bruce Manson**

Practitioners of contemporary Paganism celebrate eight annual festivals marking the passing of the seasons and changes in the natural world. The research presented here examines the ways in which the rituals marking two of these festivals, Samhain and Beltane, are meaningful to followers of Neo-Paganism. It is the primary thesis of this work that the meaningfulness of these rituals lies in the fact that they are a vehicle to personal growth and transformation for participants; on another level, they allow men and women dissatisfied with, or unfulfilled by, particular aspects of the dominant western culture to dissent from that culture in key ways. This is demonstrated through accounts of observations of Samhain and Beltane rituals, and interviews with celebrants. This is also shown by viewing these ceremonies through the models of ritual presented by a number of scholars. It is suggested that despite this distancing of self from the dominant culture in specific ways, Neo-Pagans are not a marginalized body wholly opposed to, or at odds with, western cultural norms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt thanks are extended to all the men and women who permitted me to interview them and observe their Samhain and Beltane rituals as I was compiling data for this research study. Without the cooperation, generosity, and remarkable candor of ritual organizers and participants alike, this work would not have been possible.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Pagan movement, a spiritual tradition inspired by ancient indigenous ways and based on the sacralization of nature, is reputedly one of the fastest growing religions in the western world. Depending on the source, the estimated number of practitioners ranges from the tens to the hundreds of thousands. Although the Neo-Pagan community is immense, it is impossible to know precisely how large the movement actually is. A number of followers are secretive about their beliefs and practice, primarily due to a fear of being misunderstood and persecuted.¹

At any rate, sheer numbers alone do not speak of the diversity of Neo-Paganism. Indeed, it is a spiritual tradition which is comprised of a multitude of pathways; primary among them is Wicca, the strand of Neo-Paganism which is at the forefront of the Pagan revival. Wiccan practice, itself consisting of many traditions, is a spiritual belief system which involves worshipping ancient deities and achieving self-understanding. Also inherent in Wicca is the development and use of psychic and magical powers, as well as a body of natural lore which is often called natural "magic."² Other perhaps less prominent strands of Neo-Paganism include Druidry, based on the practices of the priestly caste of the ancient Celts; Heathenism, rooted in Norse and Anglo-Saxon myths; and Shamanism, inspired by the practices of the holy men and women who act as conduits between individuals and supernatural beings in indigenous societies.

Despite possessing a number of differences, these Neo-Pagan pathways have in common a number of characteristics. Among them is a pantheistic worldview, the belief that the divine is present in everything that lives, and that every living thing is thus

worthy of honour;³ it follows, then, that in their practice, Neo-Pagans venerate the “life force” itself. Related to this is a polytheistic worldview; contemporary Pagans believe that the divine has made itself manifest through many deities in different places at different times, no one deity expressing the totality of the divine.⁴ For some modern-day Pagans, each deity is a bona fide individual entity, while for others, each is merely an aspect of the one divine. Contemporary Pagan pathways also share a recognition of both male and female principles of divinity, acknowledging that the divine is represented as both goddess and god. Another characteristic common to the various Neo-Pagan traditions is the paramount importance of ritual, the area which is to be explored in this study.

The majority of Neo-Pagans celebrate three principal kinds of rituals, the first being initiation rites. Most traditions of Wicca, for example, are entered via a rite, the purpose of which is to cause a spiritual awakening in the initiate that will link him or her to the group mind of the coven (an individual band of Wiccans), as well as to the coven’s “greater family,” the tradition.⁵ Second, many contemporary Pagans also celebrate rites of passage. Such ceremonies typically consist of acts which mark the transition from adolescence to adulthood, assisting young people in comprehending the responsibilities they are to take on as men and women.

The focus of the present research will be the third type of rituals performed by Neo-Pagans: those which mark seasonal festivals. Indeed, Neo-Pagans celebrate eight annual seasonal festivals tied to changes in nature, each of which is accompanied by a variety of rituals. These are Samhain, held on October 31, marking the midway point of autumn and the beginning of the “dark half” of the annual cycle (and, significantly, the

Neo-Pagan new year); the winter solstice, known as Yule; Imbolc, an early February celebration marking the return of light to the land; the spring equinox, called Ostara; Beltane, held on May 1, a celebration of the middle of spring, the bounty of the earth, and the commencement of the light half of the year; the summer solstice, or Midsummer; Lughnasad, an early August celebration of the harvest; and the autumnal equinox, known as Mabon. The two most important of these festivals to most Neo-Pagans are Samhain and Beltane, marking the division of the year into two distinct halves characterized, respectively, by darkness and by light; not coincidentally, it is the rituals associated with these two festivals which will be the narrow focus of this work.

The rituals accompanying the Samhain and Beltane festivals are clearly important to Neo-Pagans in that they mark occurrences in the natural world; these rituals, however, may have more significance to contemporary Pagans than simply a means of celebrating the changes that flow through winter, spring, summer, and autumn. Bearing this in mind, it is the purpose of this work to explore other manners in which these rituals may be important to Neo-Pagans. More pointedly, the question at the heart of this work will be, "In what ways are rituals accompanying the Samhain and Beltane festivals meaningful to the lives of Neo-Pagan individuals and groups?" This work will argue that the rituals which mark these contemporary Pagan seasonal festivals are meaningful to men and women in that they are a vehicle to personal growth and transformation; on a deeper level, they afford men and women the opportunity to dissent in specific ways from the dominant western culture, one they find unsatisfying and unfulfilling in a number of key areas.

In broaching the subject at hand, the first third of this work will “set the stage” for our consideration of seasonal rituals in contemporary Paganism by providing a historical context through which to view the movement. Chapter one will consist of an overview of the religion of the ancient Celts, important in that Celtic practice informs the rituals of present-day Pagans more than any other source, providing the inspiration for what these men and women do in their rites. In outlining the religion of the Celts of antiquity, special attention will be paid to the seasonal rituals of that group, particularly Samhain and Beltane, as it is the matter of ritual which is at the heart of this work. The growth of Neo-Paganism, with origins in eighteenth-century Europe, will then be chronicled in chapter two in order to provide a narrower historical framework and to inform the reader of the eclecticism with which the Neo-Pagan movement has drawn from various sources.

The second third of the work will consist of an account of the Samhain and Beltane festivals as marked by a number of contemporary Pagan groups; chapter three will examine the October 31 festival, while chapter four will look at the May 1 celebration. The field research for this study was carried out through attending and observing the rituals accompanying the celebrations of Samhain and Beltane held by a variety of Neo-Pagan groups in the greater Montreal area. Interviews were also conducted with the men and women involved in these rituals, as organizers and participants alike were questioned as to their perspective on the festivals in question, and their groups’ marking of them. Through an examination of the data collected in this fieldwork, we will have a window into what Neo-Pagans actually do in their rituals; moreover, some of the main contentions of this thesis concerning the ways in which

seasonal rituals are meaningful to practitioners of contemporary Paganism will begin to emerge.

In the final section of this work, the theories of ritual forwarded by a number of scholars will be used to interpret the data collected in the field research stage, and to shed light on the question that is central to our study. Chapter five will be a consideration of the matter at hand through the perspective on ritual provided by Romanian historian of religion Mircea Eliade, as well as Neo-Pagan scholar Loretta Orion's extension of the model of British anthropologist Victor Turner. These two theories of ritual will be considered in the same chapter due to the fact that the light which they shed on the topic is of a related nature.

In the sixth chapter, the Samhain and Beltane celebrations examined in this work will first be viewed from the model of ritual of French sociologist Emile Durkheim. The chapter will end with the consideration of our data through the theory of ritual provided by Canadian scholar of religion Frederick Bird. Once again, these two models will appear in the same chapter because of the similar insights which they provide us as regards the matter at hand.

We will conclude with a consideration and synthesis of the most salient points which will have emerged from the body of this work. This will be more than a mere summary, however; what will have been established in the core of this research will serve as a springboard to reach important final insights concerning the meaningfulness of Neo-Pagan seasonal rituals to followers of the tradition.

CHAPTER 1

THE ANCIENT CELTS: INSPIRATION FOR NEO-PAGAN PRACTICE

Many contemporary Pagans demonstrate remarkable eclecticism in the manner in which they obtain inspiration for what they believe and do. Modern Pagan belief and practice draw upon such wide-ranging sources as the world's ancient religions, indigenous traditions from across the globe, and the mystical bent of the world's major faiths; indeed, a single practitioner of Neo-Paganism might combine an affinity with the Roman solar deity Apollo, a subscription to the beneficial properties of the Lakota sweatlodge, and a recognition of the wisdom of the Kabbalah's theological speculation. This eclecticism extends firmly into the realm of the festivals (and concomitant rituals) which Neo-Pagans celebrate as well, as many individuals incorporate the practices of a number of these sources into what they do.

There is, however, one source which, above all others, informs the practices of most modern-day Pagans, particularly as regards the festivals they celebrate: the ancient Celts. The Celts of antiquity (of the Bronze Age in particular) are perceived by many Neo-Pagans as spiritual, intuitive, and close to nature; their worldview is one to be emulated in order to cultivate and recreate in the modern world these lost qualities.¹ As Marion Bowman points out,

Increasingly people are looking back longingly to a Golden Age located in the untainted, sacralized life of the noble savage, and for many in Britain and beyond, that noble savage is undoubtedly a Celt. The Celts...are now seen as less tainted, as repositories of a spirituality, a sense of tradition, a oneness with nature that has elsewhere been lost...Moreover, people from a variety of spiritual and secular backgrounds are not simply content to eulogize that Celtic Golden Age, they wish to recapture it.²

Given this, the significant influence of ancient Celtic religion on modern Neo-Pagan practice, an overview of the religion of the Celts is in order in the present work; it is to that matter to which we will turn our attention in this chapter. Although it is somewhat beyond our scope, the first step in the matter is a brief account of the very origins of the Celts, as these origins were to influence the shape which Celtic religious practice was to assume.

Despite being steeped in uncertainty, the emergence of the Celts, most scholars concur, can be traced to Eastern Europe before the dawn of the first millennium BCE. The Celts did not comprise a “race” as such, as the Celtic homeland was an ever-changing collection of tribal nations. Rather, the Celts were a broad cultural-linguistic group.³ From their homeland in Eastern Europe, the Celts, between 1200 and 700 BCE, moved to modern-day Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and France, as Hallstatt culture, the earliest stage in Celtic cultural development, became identifiable⁴ by the eighth century BCE. A century later, as a consequence of warfare, the Celts came into contact with Greek and Etruscan cultures, coming to adapt Graeco-Etruscan elements into their own culture.⁵ In the late sixth century BCE, in Northern France, Switzerland, and the middle Rhine, another recognizable stage of Celtic culture developed: the “La Tene” era, a period bearing the name of the part of Switzerland in which artifacts typifying Celtic life of the period have been unearthed.⁶

By the fifth century BCE, again due primarily to warfare, the Celts began to migrate from the Central European region they had inhabited for centuries, entering several other parts of Europe such as the Po Valley in Northern Italy (at the end of the fifth century BCE), the Balkans (the fourth century BCE), Asia Minor (the third century

BCE), Spain (the third century BCE), Britain (the sixth century BCE), and Ireland (the late fifth century BCE). By the first century BCE, the fortunes of the Celts began to change, as Slavic tribes drove them out of Eastern Europe, the Romans conquered them in the west, and, later, the confederation of Germanic tribes called the Alamanni overran them in Southern Germany.⁷ By this time, only Gaul proper and the islands of Britain and Ireland remained independent Celtic territory, Celts elsewhere having succumbed to foreign powers.⁸

In concluding our look at this issue, that of the spread of Celtic civilization in the ancient world, we may observe in closing that despite the above-documented decrease in importance of the Celts (and despite the further inroads which were to be made into remaining Celtic territories, most notably by the Romans in first-century CE Britain), Celtic culture was never totally eliminated from Europe. It was, in fact, to thrive in the regions of the “holdout” areas cited above, regions such as Ireland, Wales, Scotland, Cornwall, the Isle of Man, and Brittany.⁹ Our overview of the migrations of the Celts and the spread of their culture having been explored in sufficient detail for the purposes of the present work, we may now continue and examine the religious practices of that group.

When addressing the matter of ancient Celtic religion, it is essential to bear in mind the issue of temporal and regional differences, as the ancient Celts lived over a great time span and, with the Celtic diaspora, in a great variety of places; despite certain common points, we must refrain from speaking of a convenient “common Celtic religion.” There is a distinct tendency to take the Irish pattern of religious festivals as typifying the practices of Celts from Ireland to the Alps; the evidence on the matter is,

however, inconclusive.¹⁰ We can assume a certain, perhaps sizeable, overlap in religious practice among Celts of varying areas at varying times, yet a theory of absolute uniformity can not be forwarded; the possibility of local variation is a factor which must be borne in mind when investigating the issue. It is impossible to work on the assumption that the “Celtic world” formed a whole, from Ireland to continental Europe, and that the Celts were always and everywhere much the same.¹¹ In view of this absence of uniformity in Celtic religion, we may proceed to narrow our focus in considering the religion of the Celts to the last few centuries BCE and the first few centuries CE, to those areas which are commonly considered Celtic lands in the modern era: Scotland, Wales, Brittany, and, most significantly, Ireland. Despite the fact that an undeniable amount of variation in religion and culture existed over that period of time and among those regions, the relative degree of homogeneity was such that, given the scope of the present work, we may view them as constituting a distinct religious and cultural entity. This is also the soundest approach which may be taken simply because it is about those groups that we have the greatest number of written sources; moreover, importantly, it is to these peoples that many modern-day Pagans look for inspiration in their practice.

In beginning our consideration of the religion of the ancient Celts, the central role of the Druids must be examined, as it was the Druids who were the priestly caste in Celtic society, and were as such the group responsible for the carrying out of all religious ceremonies and rituals. Scholars have long sought to unequivocally answer the question regarding the precise nature of the relationship of the Druids and the Celtic masses. A number of researchers have asserted that the Druids were a group within the indigenous population of the British Isles, an ethnic group whose presence in that part of the world

pre-dated the arrival of the Celts by millennia. This argument continues that the Celts, conquering this aboriginal people upon their arrival, came to adopt the indigenous religion which they encountered in the British Isles, continuing to make use of the Druids as priests.¹² As other scholars, among them J.A. MacCulloch, point out, however, it is unlikely that an invading people would embrace the religious system of a nation they had vanquished, then make it their own.¹³ MacCulloch continues that it is likely that Druids existed wherever the Celts were found, though perhaps not always called “Druids.”¹⁴ Echoing this is French Celtic scholar Jean Markale, who suggests that it is “not useful to seek the origin of Druidism anywhere but among the Celts themselves.”¹⁵

As regards the actual role of the Druids in Celtic society, as suggested by Strabo, alongside Celtic nobility, the Druids were the group which was held in the highest esteem by the Celts (along with related bodies known as “Bards” and “Vates”).¹⁶ The Druids had a number of functions, the overseeing of all things religious being but one of many; the priestly caste also performed the roles of judges in both private and public disputes, scientists, moral philosophers,¹⁷ historians, and physicians. The related bodies known as “Bards,” who were musicians, singers, and poets and “Vates,” who acted as seers and soothsayers who interpreted omens and guided the Druids in their decisions, were also held in high regard in the Celtic world.¹⁸ This contention is backed up by the writings of Pliny, who states that the Druids, Vates, and Bards seem to have monopolized the power base.¹⁹

Turning our attention from the issue of religious authority among the Celts to actual Celtic religious practice, of great significance is the very location in which the Celts worshipped, telling as it is very regarding their worldview. The Celts made

offerings to the gods throughout the landscape, indicative of the great reverence these ancient Pagans held for the natural world. One important location was the sacred grove; Tacitus, in his description of the rout of the Druids of Anglesey in 59 CE, writes of “groves sacred to savage rites” which the Romans cut down.²⁰ Reverence for springs was similarly prevalent, two well-known examples being from Gaul: the shrine of Sequana at the source of the Seine in Burgundy, and Chamalieres near Clermont-Ferrand.²¹

Also notable among the fundamental tenets of Celtic religion is the concept of the “ensoulment” of all things on earth, and the concomitant veneration of a number of gods, goddesses, and spirits, both local and general. This appears to many scholars to indicate not only a pantheistic but also a polytheistic worldview; others, among them Jean Markale, disagree, suggesting that,

In order to manifest, the deity needs to split into its multiple faces – the passage from the absolute to the relative. Under these conditions the gods of the Celtic pantheon are manifestations of the functional multiplicity of an absolute, unknown, incomprehensible, unnameable, and, therefore, infinite god, who is supposed to be the cause of everything.²²

On the same matter, Cunliffe writes that,

The essential structure was a dualism between the male tribal god and the female deity of the land. The male deity was the Dagda...who served as the protector of the tribe. The Dagda’s counterpart and consort was the Morrigan...often associated with the symbolism of the horse. She is both fertile and destructive.”²³

At any rate, be they bona fide gods, simply aspects of an individual deity, or reflective of a binary opposition, indisputable is the fact that the ancient Celts did in some manner revere a number of gods and goddesses. A number of these deities were Celtic warrior and battle gods, not surprising given the high esteem in which warriors were held by the Celts. Gods representing natural forces were likewise prominent in Celtic

religions, such as Leucetius, the lightning god, Vintius, the wind god, as well as gods of light, fire, the ocean, and thunder. Deities were associated with all aspects of nature by the ancient Celts, again indicative of the Celtic reverence of the natural world; these included gods and goddesses of streams, lakes, rivers, hills, mountains, animals and plants. Some were general nature divinities, while others were deities of specific locations; among them were the goddess Boann, associated with the Boyne River in Ireland, and the goddess Ritona, linked to the Rieu River in France.²⁴

The ancient Celts recognized both male and female principles of divinity, another significant aspect of their worldview. In fact, the Pagan Celts held the female principle in equal regard to the male, and perhaps in higher esteem. Along with those mentioned above, the Celtic pantheon had a number of goddesses, including Dana, the Celtic Great Mother goddess (the mother of the Tuatha De Danaan, the gods and goddesses of Ireland), Aine, goddess of love, and Grian, sun goddess. Significantly, the Celts also venerated female nature spirits such as water sprites, oak sprites, and kinswomen.²⁵

Given that it is the seasonal festivals of the ancient Celts, and the rituals which accompany these celebrations, which is the narrow focus of the present chapter, it is to that matter to which we will now turn. Before examining the actual seasonal celebrations of the Celtic Pagans, we must, as a first step, briefly consider their perceptions of time, as it was the manner in which the Celts viewed the passage of time and the coming and going of seasons which was at the core of these celebrations. As indicated by the oldest known Celtic calendar, the Celts based their conception of time on a lunar system, months beginning at the full moon.²⁶ The compilers of the calendar were clearly aware that the full moons of a lunar year cycle do not coincide with a 365-day solar year, and

consequently devised a thirty-year system made up of five cycles of sixty-two full moons and one cycle of sixty-one full moons. The months carried names which refer to particular functions for the time of the year in question, examples being “Seedfall”, the rough equivalent of the modern November, and “Equos,” marked at the time of the summer solstice. Not insignificantly, the Celts held a number of rites and ceremonies in accordance with the phases of the moon.²⁷

As regards Celtic seasonal festivals, the proof is irrefutable that each celebration was related not to the moon but to the solar time of the year. The Celtic year was, for all intents and purposes, broken into two seasons of winter and summer, November 1 to May 1, and May 1 to the next November 1; each season was then further divided into two halves. Contrary to the practices of a number of contemporary Pagans, there is no evidence to the effect that the ancient Celts celebrated the solstices and the equinoxes; to the contrary, the four festivals which were indeed celebrated were calculated to fall forty days after an equinox or a solstice.²⁸ These four festivals were Samhain, the new year of the ancient Celts, celebrated on November 1; Imbolc, held on February 1, a relatively small purification festival exalting fire and water, marking the middle of winter; Beltane, on May 1, indicating the end of winter and celebrating the re-awakening of the land, as herds were put out to pasture; and Lughnasad, on August 1, a harvest festival of sorts, consisting of games and assemblies.²⁹ The two most important festivals, and, not coincidentally, those which are under investigation in the present study, were Samhain and Beltane.

The most important holiday celebrated by the Celts was “Samhain,” or “end of summer;” marking the Celtic new year, it was celebrated on November 1 (beginning, in

fact, at sunset on October 31), and was, in all likelihood, presided over by the deity Lugh, a god of light who fights the powers of the darkness.³⁰ Ancient Celtic society was ruled by the seasons and the tasks on the land, and in ancient Ireland, Samhain was an important marker of temporal space as it indicated the start of winter and unavoidable changes in lifestyle.³¹ The festival marked the end of the grazing season, when flocks and herds were assembled, and only the breeding stock was not earmarked for slaughter.³²

Bearing in mind that the Celts, as witnessed by Caesar, saw the beginning of all things in a nocturnal deity, it is not surprising that Samhain, a festival marking the onset of winter and the commencement of the dark half of the year, was the beginning of the Celtic new year. This is reflective of the basic Celtic concept that darkness precedes light, illumination flowing forth from initial obscurity. Further evidence of the belief that darkness brings forth light is that Samhain, like every day on the Celtic calendar, began at nightfall, continuing through the light which followed, ending with the sunset of the next day.³³

Another crucial aspect of Samhain is that after nightfall on October 31 each year, time as we know it was abolished for the ancient Celts.³⁴ This is best illustrated by the tale "Etaine and the King of Shadows," from the Irish mythological cycle, a tale which takes place one Samhain night. In the story, each of the underground mounds, the domains of the gods, can have only one titular head. The god Dagda wishes his son, Angus, to have his own domain, but none is to be found, as each already has a ruler. Dagda schemes to relieve a rival, Elcmar, of his domain in a technically legal manner, and give it to Angus. Dagda takes Angus to visit Elcmar and convinces his son to ask

Elcmar for sovereignty of his domain for a night and a day, knowing full well that a night and a day at Samhain is tantamount to eternity. Elcmar, inebriated from the festivities of the occasion, is oblivious to this, and agrees to the request, effectively relinquishing control of the domain to Angus. This tale clearly demonstrates the ancient Celtic belief that time as we know it is suspended at Samahin.³⁵

And what did the Samhain celebration itself entail? In broaching this matter, mention must first be made of actual participation in the festival. All indications are that active involvement in the new year proceedings was very much a social obligation, as members of the community were required to attend the festivities; in fact, individuals who did not partake were felt to be risking madness and death through their absence. This is indicated in an ancient Irish tale from the Ulster cycle, “The Birth of Conchobar,” which has the king of Ulster insisting that “any Ulsterman who did not come to [his fortress] Emain would lose his reason and his tumulus, his tomb, and his stone would be erected the following morning.” Clearly, all members of the tribe or kingdom, regardless of social status, were obliged to attend.³⁶

All community members were permitted to partake of the various amusements of the festival, and listen to discussions concerning economic, religious, and political matters; figuring prominently among the proceedings were business transactions and lawyers’ addresses regarding the relations between individuals and the community.³⁷ Indeed, marking as it did the year’s end, Samhain was the time at which individuals assembled and tithes were paid.³⁸ Moreover, in Ireland, every third Samhain, a sort of parliament was held at which all the scholars of the land met in order to regulate and renew the rules and laws, and to approve the annals and archives.³⁹

Augury was also practiced at the time of Samhain. This stems from the belief that on this day, the veil between this world, the world of the living, and the world of the dead was at its thinnest. Indeed, as pointed out by Jean Markale, at Samhain the living and the dead met each other, as the barrows where the gods and heroes lived opened, and the two worlds intersected.⁴⁰ The gates between this world and the next were open, and there was communion between the living and the spirits of the dead who were free to haunt the earth.⁴¹ It was a liminal time between the old year and the new, and, as such, was a time of danger; the spirits of the dead could roam free.⁴² As a consequence of this contact with the otherworld, Samhain was a time of divination when the Irish kings encouraged the Druids to foresee the events of the year to come.⁴³ The Druids and soothsayers would predict future patterns of farming and hunting, the times of astronomical and weather-related phenomena, and the political maneuverings of neighbouring kingdoms. Indeed, as indicated by British historian Ronald Hutton, “Samhain was a time of change and transformation when both the past and the present met with the uncertain tides of the future yet to come.”⁴⁴

Precious little of substance is known as to what the Samhain ritual itself involved. What is unquestionable is that in Ireland, on Samhain Eve, all fires were extinguished, symbolizing the death of the old year. The year was to be reborn the moment that the Druids kindled a new fire. Also likely, as Markale points out, is that the Samhain ritual involved dramatic re-enactments of great primordial myths.⁴⁵ One such myth may have been that at Samhain the god Dagda and the goddess Morrigan united, and through their intercourse the protection of the tribe and fertility of all their

endeavours were guaranteed. In some versions of the myth, the goddess, by year's end an old hag, was rejuvenated by the union and once again became young and beautiful.⁴⁶

Another probable aspect of the ritual centred around the idea that the king was in a weakened state at Samhain, the juncture of two years, and in need of a regeneration of power, a regeneration which could take place through his death and rebirth. It is therefore likely that bulls were sacrificed at Samhain, losing their lives in the stead of the king. Through his symbolic death, the monarch was thought to acquire an inner vision of the other world, leading to his recovery of strength, rendering him able to face the new year. Indeed, a number of epic tales of the Celts speak of the death of the king at Samhain.⁴⁷

Related to this concept, that of the acquisition of an inner vision of the other world leading to the regaining of strength bringing about the ability to face the new year, was another essential element of the Samhain ritual: the feast, open only to the governing class and the Druids. At the three-day-long celebratory meal, wine was drunk and pork was eaten; the eating of pork was perceived as giving immortality, while the imbibing of wine undoubtedly resulted in intoxication, creating a state in which individuals could transcend apparent reality and acquire access to the supernatural realm.⁴⁸ In fact, as Markale remarks, the orgy of eating and drinking was part of "a sacred ritual whose objective (was to) surpass the human condition by awakening all the resources of the individual in order to reach the supernatural and divine."⁴⁹ To be in a state of drunkenness was to be in the middle, to be on the vague border separating the real and the imaginary worlds, the visible and the invisible, the light and the shadow, the divine and the human."⁵⁰ It is likely that the ritual gluttony and drunkenness at the time of the feast

was an effort to disconnect from the realities of daily existence, attain a higher level of consciousness, glimpse into the otherworld, and be transformed by the experience, thus being rejuvenated and better able to deal with the exigencies of the year to come.⁵¹

The other festival under consideration in this work, the celebration which was, most scholars concur, second in importance only to Samhain for the ancient Celts, is “Beltane,” celebrated on May 1 (as mentioned above, as with all festivals marked by the ancient Celts, given that each given day was believed to begin at nightfall, it is perhaps more accurate to cite the evening of April 30 as the beginning of celebration). The name “Beltane” translates to “Bel’s fire,” “Belenus” being the Celtic fire god in Gaul (“Bile” in Ireland), a dispenser of healing and, significantly, light; the clear reference to brightness and heat is not surprising, given that the festival occurred at winter’s end.⁵² Indeed, Beltane marked the beginning of summer, the commencement of the light half of the year (the other pivotal extreme on the calendar from Samhain), and was, like Samhain, a pastoralist festival. In fact, as pointed out by Markale, it follows that May 1 served as an opening to light and life, an introduction to the diurnal universe. As argued by the French scholar,

If (Samhain was the time at which) one entered into a state of “hibernation,” it was at Beltane that a sign of “reawakening” appeared. During the winter, fire is invisible, hidden in the wood, stones, and inert matter. But the energy that fire represents exists in the state of potentiality. At the Beltane festival this energy that fire represents was manifested and achieved a veritable “epiphany.”⁵³

Along similar lines, May 1 was perceived as the time of mystical union when plants are in full growth and harmony with their environment,⁵⁴ a celebration of the time that trees and crops come into full greenery and bloom.

An integral aspect of the festival of Beltane was its inextricable link to the otherworld of deities and spirits. Alongside the obvious association with Bel, the god of fire (as indicated above), Beltane also marked the time of year that the mythical invasions of Ireland occurred; according to the *Irish Book of Invasions (Leabhar Gabhala)*, the Tuatha de Danaan, a divine society of beings who associated with each other and dwelled in a parallel world with its own politics and customs, landed in Ireland on May 1.⁵⁵ Moreover, Beltane was, like Samhain, a time when the otherworld was believed to communicate with the world of humans.

Not a great deal is known regarding the festivities which took place on Beltane, including the actual ritual which was performed by the ancient Celts to mark the day, but the entire festival was undoubtedly one of great merriment and rejoicing, not surprising when one bears in mind the optimistic tone of the day. It was undoubtedly a sacerdotal festival, one at which Druids were honoured, and included ceremonies, games, assemblies, and feasts.⁵⁶ The focus on enjoyment was such that it was, in fact, illegal for individuals to gain retribution for debts or settle accounts on Beltane, feared as it was that such actions would mar the day. Along similar lines, outlaws and individuals attempting to evade authorities were free from prosecution and capture on Beltane.⁵⁷

Given that May 1 was the commencement of summer, a time when great fruitfulness was expected from the sea, the livestock, and the land, the rituals marking the day undoubtedly focused on bounty and fecundity; it was the time when the High King was symbolically mated with the sovereignty of the land in order to ensure the fertility of everything which was on and within the land itself. The motif of fertility existed on an individual level as well, as common people took the opportunity to ensure their own

potency; one means of doing so was the planting of a maypole, an obvious fertility symbol, into the earth, then the performance of a dance around the pole.⁵⁸ A related custom which clearly reflects the return of bounty to the land, a celebration of the very fertility of the earth, was the planting of branches in the fields and gardens, as well as over stables.⁵⁹

Another theme around which rituals marking Beltane centred was the element of fire, not surprising given the Celts' focus on the sun's approaching the zenith of its strength. One custom associated with the festival was the very lighting of ritual fires on May 1, those fires having been extinguished at sunset on the eve of May Day so that the element of fire would be absent throughout the night.⁶⁰ Significantly, it was the king of Ireland who was to be the first person to in fact light the fire on Beltane, doing so on the mountaintop at Tara, spiritual centre of Ireland. (Any individual who lit a fire before the king was, in fact, to be condemned to die.) The flames that began to spring from the pyre of the hill, protected by the Druids, were more than symbolic; in the cycle of days and seasons they were evidence that life could be emerge from death.⁶¹

On a more local level, the morning of May 1, a new fire was ritually made in all regions, kindled with a wooden spindle turned into a wooden socket.⁶² The Beltane fire (or "Need-Fire") was lit from this, using the wood of nine different sorts of trees. This fire burned in the middle of a square of nine turfs. Community members would jump through the flames to be purified; two fires were sometimes lit, and livestock were driven through the two for purification before they were put out to graze on summer pastures. Each household would take fire from the Beltane fire, using it to relight their hearth.⁶³

The most important thing we have seen in this chapter, bearing in mind the nature of the present work, is that the ancient Celts' Samhain and Beltane festivals (quite like their other seasonal festivals) were elaborate events tied to the changes that run through the natural world. Moreover, the rituals accompanying these festivals had profound meaning for those who celebrated them, related to issues of life, death, and personal insight. As we continue, later in this work, we will see how these rituals are similarly meaningful for the contemporary Pagans who perform them, and will attempt to zero in on precisely what this meaningfulness is. First, however, we will turn our attention to the growth of the contemporary Pagan movement in order to come to a fuller understanding of the way in which Neo-Pagan ritual has evolved.

CHAPTER 2

THE ROOTS OF NEO-PAGANISM

Contemporary Paganism is a tradition which can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century in England; the roots of the movement and its rituals, however, as pointed out by English historian Ronald Hutton, extend back much further to Europe in the period stretching from 1800 to 1940. It was in the approximate century and a half between the dawn of the nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth century (when contemporary Paganism “officially” came to be)¹ that elements began to emerge which were to develop and become prominent in Neo-Paganism, particularly in the area of ritual. In this chapter, we will begin by looking at these phenomena. Following this, we will examine the manner in which they began to crystallize in the ideas and writings of key individuals and groups in the early decades of the twentieth century. Our attention will then turn to the actual emergence of the Neo-Pagan movement in the mid-twentieth century, and the road that modern Paganism was to follow as it began to take its place alongside other world religions.

Hutton identifies seven features which were to appear and begin to develop during the period under investigation, the first being the emergence of the very ideological position which was to come to characterize Neo-Paganism. Of the many ways in which Paganism was represented in the era under consideration, the contemporary form of the tradition is linked to the one which viewed Paganism as a religion which had been inextricably linked to the awe-inspiring literature, philosophy, and art of the ancient world, inferior to Christianity only in its ethics. This position continued that European

culture was founded and still rested upon the literary and artistic works of antiquity, as well as the deities of that world and those works, now viewed as allegorical or mythical figures.²

A more aggressive strain of this fascination with and reverence for the ancient Pagan world existed, a variety which challenged accepted norms. It wholeheartedly admired ancient Pagan religions, lauding them for their inherent freedom, joy, and affirmation of life; they were characterized as deeply linked to creativity and the natural world. This position envisioned an ideal rural landscape in which the human, natural, and supernatural worlds co-existed in a state of tranquility. As Hutton points out, it was German Romanticism of the late-eighteenth century which fused admiration for ancient Greece, nostalgia for a vanished past, and a desire for an organic unity between people, culture, and nature, in which the roots of this ideology is found, and which is the source for committed modern Pagan discourse.³ In eighteenth-century Germany, there grew an association of the ancient Greeks and nature, creativity, and freedom, contrasted with the unnatural, authoritarian, overspecialized modern world.⁴ This genre of thought and writing is well represented by the works of Johann Joachim Winckelmann from the 1750's, as well as those of Goethe in the 1770's and 80's. The writing of Johann von Schiller, in his 1788 poem "The Gods of Greece," is also reflective of this way of thinking.⁵ As he writes,

O'er the lovely world you were reigning,
 Governing with happiness's soft hand
 Generations blissful neath your training,
 Lovely beings of a fabled land-
 Whilst yet rapturous was the ritual dancing,
 Oh how different then, and better far
 Where those times which crowned your shrines entrancing,
 Venus Amathusia! ⁶

In the early part of the nineteenth century this discourse had reached England, and had been embraced by practically all of the Romantic poets of its first generation. By 1815, Benjamin Haydon wrote of the superiority of the “beauties of Pagan mythology to the gloomy repentance of the Christians;”⁷ Keats and Shelley were of similar minds, Shelley being more critical of orthodox religion, and more involved in applied Paganism.⁸ Even the conventional William Wordsworth extolled the virtues of nature and almost hesitantly made reference to the way in which Paganism had enchanted the landscape. In his “Lines Written in Early Spring,” he spoke of faith in nature and despair over the denatured situation of humanity, writing,

To her fair works did nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieve’d my heart to think
What man has made of man.⁹

As the century wore on, this view was to find later expression in the works of author Algernon Charles Swinburne in the mid-nineteenth century in his *Poems and Ballads*, which was to later inform Neo-Pagan luminaries (Aleister Crowley and Gerald Gardner),¹⁰ as well as the writing of Edward Carpenter, who wrote longingly of the day when “the meaning of the old religions (would) come back to modern man,” in works like *Civilization: Its Cause and Cure*.¹¹ This ideological position extolling the virtues of the natural world and glorifying the vanished past was indeed to become the “language” adopted by Neo-Pagans of the twentieth century.¹²

Another element from the period under consideration which was to inform modern Paganism, particularly in the area of ritual, was the growth of secret societies, above all the Freemasons (as well as the organizations which Freemasonry was to later

inspire, among them the Ancient Order of Foresters, Ancient Order of Druids, and the Society of Oddfellows).¹³ The Freemasons are indeed significant for the purposes of the present work in the influence they were to exert on contemporary Paganism; for this reason, we will now consider certain aspects of that group in particular. As argued by David Stevenson, the Freemasons came into being in the Scotland of the late sixteenth century. They trace their roots to the medieval crafts or local associations of artisans and traders, groups which were organized into a network of local bodies within a more extensive network, possessed a mystical history, employed pledges for new members, and had a set of initiation rites for new members after which secrets of the trade in question were handed down to these newcomers. In fact, medieval Stonemasons had a rich body of mythology, equating their work with mathematics and geometry.¹⁴ Given the fact that their work required them to be very mobile, Stonemasons, over the course of time, evolved a flexible system of organizations called “lodges,” and likewise created a set of secret signs taught those who were admitted. The Freemasons, Stevenson continues, evolved out of this tradition, emerging in the final decades of the sixteenth century. They incorporated many changes into their practices, including the establishment of more permanent lodges, the admittance of members who were not working masons, an emphasis on the ethical ideas at the core of Masonic lore, and a focus on the value of inherited knowledge.¹⁵

The dawn of the seventeenth century provides the first existing information about Masonic rituals, primarily initiation rites; they are indicative of the secrecy and magical imagery which so characterized Masonic practice.¹⁶ In the first rite, the initiate was, among other things, shown hidden signs and taught the mythical history. Secret

embraces and passwords were taught, ceremonies to frighten the initiate were carried out, and an oath was taken. The initiate was shown a death's head, two pillars, a square, and a compass, and was then explained the esoteric significance of each symbol. New signs and postures were learned at the second initiation, and another oath was taken. By all accounts, the Masons were indeed becoming an organization in which secrecy played a great role, similar to the craft guilds of the time.¹⁷ When Freemasonry reached England in the mid-seventeenth century, a constitution, laws, and governance were added to the pre-existing initiation ceremonies, mythical history, and the recitation of oaths; these mixtures came to be known as "the craft," a group of individuals united to foster virtue and wisdom within a secular constitutional setting.¹⁸ Masonic ritual was to become much more elaborate and esoteric over the course of the eighteenth century, and involved initiates being stripped naked and re-clothed in a ritual robe, taking an oath at knifepoint, and facing a number of riddles presented by senior members.¹⁹

Religious eclecticism was to inform Masonic practice as well as more textual and archaeological information came in; the basic structure of Freemasonry was added to and extended. A great deal of imagery from Egyptian civilization in particular was introduced, and there was similarly an infusion of Greek and Roman mystery religions, and the cultures of early Mesopotamia. The names of Egyptian, Syrian, and Babylonian sky-gods were added, in prayers to the Supreme Deity, to the more familiar Jehovah.²⁰

As Hutton notes, the Freemasons used religious language, and the tradition implied was not Christianity. The focus was on an acceptance of all traditions, representing an accumulated wisdom, a syncretic patriarchal monotheism in which all ancient sky-gods and father-gods were seen as aspects of the Supreme Being; thus, a

spiritual life outside the church came to be. (Significantly, for these societies, it was important to purport direct ancestry from ancient past, as it was safer to practice non-mainstream customs if the space in which they were operating had existed since ancient times.)²¹ Bearing in mind all the above, we will see that modern Paganism was to be a mid-twentieth century development of the tradition which had begun with Masonry, a tradition steeped in secrecy and eclectic in nature, speaking a religious language that was not clearly Christian.²²

One more phenomenon from the period being considered which was to form an integral part of Neo-Pagan ritual was the development of ceremonial magic. The resurgence of British high-ritual magic can be traced to France in the mid-nineteenth century, to one Eliphas Zahed Levi. Levi synthesized a variety of material in eighteenth-century philosophers, as well as medieval and early modern magical and alchemical texts;²³ Levi was most impressed by Freemasonry, writing of the “symbolical pictures and those hieroglyphic signs which are emblazoned on the carpets of their Lodges,” continuing that “these pictures and signs are the pages of a book of absolute and universal science.”²⁴ Levi had, in fact, been initiated into some of the secret societies derived from Freemasonry. The synthesis Levi was to create came to be known as “occultism,” signifying the revelation of hidden wisdom; in fact, Levi claimed that humankind could rediscover its lost semi-divine powers through focused study and practice.²⁵ Indeed, when addressing the function of achieving proficiency in magic in his introduction to his *The History of Magic*, Levi declares that,

The lights of human intelligence have not been left by the Supreme Reason to waver at hazard. There is an incontestable truth: there is an infallible method of knowing that truth; while those who attain this knowledge, and adopt it as a rule of life, can endow their will with a sovereign power which can make them

masters of all inferior things, all wandering spirits, or, in other words, arbiters and kings of the world.²⁶

Levi took the pentagram, an ancient magical symbol, reiterating that it was a microcosm of the universe and controlled the demons of the four elements; he went on to suggest an invoking pentagram, in which individuals could call the elements at the start of a ritual, and banish them at the ritual's completion through drawing the sign in the air above each quarter.²⁷ In the pursuit of credibility, Levi purported an ancient origin for these practices; there exists no solid evidence to back up that claim, and it is possible that he created them on his own.

Occultism arrived in Britain in the 1860's, and by the 1880's, a new group, "The Golden Dawn," was founded by Wynn Wescott and Samuel Mathers.²⁸ Mathers was to make lasting contributions to the ritual of high ceremonial magic. Among these was his development of Levi's principle of the invoking and banishing pentagram, linked to elemental spirits at each quarter of the circle, into a more advanced eight-fold system with a different drawing of the figure to call or dismiss the spirits of each element. Air was to the east, fire to the south, water to the west, and earth to the north.²⁹ Moreover, Mathers developed the consecration of sacred space, as the working area was purified through carrying water and fire around in a sunwise circle. Mathers also contributed the Masonic concept of working tools, adding it to the ritual equipment of magicians from the medieval and early modern periods.³⁰ The Golden Dawn's belief system included a powerful image of female divinity; they drew upon a wide variety of deity forms, but focused on the universal goddess of the day. The group's male deity of choice was similarly a universal one, the god Pan. For all intents and purposes, the Golden Dawn was not a religious society at all, only a magical one.³¹ These occultists were trying to

bring forth the divinity already within humans, accessing spiritual and mental power by way of traditional ritual magic.³² As will be seen later in this work, this was to greatly influence the Pagan revival of the mid-twentieth century.

Before leaving the matters of the growth of secret societies and the revival of high ritual magic in Britain, mention must be made of a group which both greatly emphasized secrecy and whose members engaged in magical practices as well: the Theosophical Society. Active in Britain but actually founded in New York by Russian-born Madame Helena Blavatsky in 1875, the Society's motto was "There is no religion higher than the truth."³³ The group's objective, as stated by Blavatsky herself, was "to reconcile all religions, sects and nations under a common system of ethics, based on eternal verities."³⁴ Indeed, Theosophy was eclectic in the sources upon which it drew. The society introduced to western seekers ancient eastern ideas, notably Hindu concepts such as karma, reincarnation, and subtle energies. Madame Blavatsky was especially intrigued by the secret esoteric teachings of each religion, which she termed, as a whole, the "wisdom religion," or the "secret doctrine." The Theosophists employed secrecy to a great degree in their practice; this was to the extent that even individuals no longer part of the society were not free to reveal anything which had been learned while members. Indeed, in Blavatsky's "The Key to Theosophy," when discussing the status of any given member who had resigned or had been expelled, she states that,

His expulsion or resignation only relieves him from the obedience to the teacher, and from that of taking an active part on the work of the Society, but surely not from the sacred pledge of secrecy.³⁵

The overlap between Theosophy and occultism was clear. In addressing the relationship between the two, Blavatsky writes,

A man may be a very good Theosophist indeed, whether in or outside of the Society, without being in any way an Occultist. But no one can be a true Occultist without being a real Theosophist; otherwise he is simply a black magician, whether conscious or unconscious.³⁶

Clearly, given the purposes of the present work, the establishment of the Theosophical Society is a development worth noting. Its emergence in the late nineteenth century is indicative of the spirit of the times, times in which a religious movement drawing eclectically from ancient sources of wisdom could appear. While certainly not a forerunner of the Neo-Paganism which was to emerge in the mid-twentieth century, Theosophy in a sense encapsulated some of the qualities which were to later crystallize as Neo-Paganism. At the very least, the Society could be seen in some key ways as paralleling the development of and shape assumed by modern Paganism several decades later.

One more occurrence from the era under examination which was to have great impact upon Neo-Paganism was the search for Pagan witchcraft which had continued unabated from ancient times. By the time of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, it had been accepted by scholars that individuals murdered in the witch trials had perished due to collective madness perpetrated by theologians, and had not been representative of any form of unorthodox religion.³⁷ Some key figures of the era, however, did not subscribe to this point of view, among them the French scholar Jules Michelet, who portrayed witchcraft as a surviving Pagan religion which had remained alive all through the Middle Ages;³⁸ American Charles Godfrey Leland concurred with Michelet's theory. In Florence, in 1886, Leland met a woman named Maddalena, who claimed to have inherited a family tradition of witchcraft. Leland amassed a great amount of data and wrote several works based on his findings, most notably "Aradia," which purports to be

the gospel of a secret religion of witches. Leland asserted that much of what he had unearthed had descended directly from ancient Pagan religion, a contention doubted by many scholars, due to Leland's reputation as an unreliable researcher.³⁹ No conclusive evidence, however, has been unearthed to conclusively prove or disprove the American's theory. In any case, this view of Witchcraft as a religious tradition which had continued unabated from ancient times was an idea which was to greatly inform contemporary Pagan thought.

Yet another development from this era which was to become prominent in modern Paganism was the discovery of the modern goddess and god. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, with changes brought in by the Romantic Movement, medieval poetry's focus on a plethora of goddesses developed into a belief in a female deity who embodied all other goddesses, and was identified with the moon and all of nature; she was frequently referred to as "Mother Earth" or "Mother Nature."⁴⁰ This was shown in the works of both Shelley and Keats, who identified the moon with the goddess in *Endymion*, written in 1818.

What is there in thee, Moon! That thou shouldst move
My heart so potently? When yet a child
I oft have dried my tears when thou hadst smiled
Thou seemst my sister: hand in hand we went
From eve to morn across the firmament....⁴¹

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the image of the goddess in English poetry took the form of the green earth and the white moon. In the late nineteenth century, this was given academic credibility by scholars of the day who cited research which validated the idea of the veneration of a single goddess in prehistoric Europe.⁴²

As regards the god, as was the case with the goddess, by the eighteenth century, there came to be a focus on far fewer deities than had been the case in earlier eras; significantly, Pan was the most frequently cited in English literature, associated with the wild, disturbing, and exciting aspects of nature.⁴³ In the early nineteenth century, he was portrayed in the works of Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley as the personification and guardian of the English countryside, and was contrasted with the perceived ugliness, brutality, and unhealthiness of the new industrial and urban environment. Pan appeared in other early-twentieth century works as an archetype; he became the most famous ancient aspect of a being characterized as “the horned god.”⁴⁴ As will become apparent later in this work, this conceptualization of “the god” and “the goddess” was to form an integral part of Neo-Pagan thought and practice, in particular in the sphere of ritual.

One more aspect of the period under study which was to influence modern-day Paganism was the idea of the survival of Pagan elements in folk rites, examined in detail by folklorists from the 1870’s until well into the twentieth century. The countryside came to be seen by many as a place in which timeless traditions were still practiced, and these were genuine vestiges of ancient Pagan religion.⁴⁵ This idealization of rural England continues today, and can be attributed to increased urbanization over the course of the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ The spirit of the times fostered the development of the Folk Song Society in 1898, as well as the Folk Lore Society, founded in 1878.

A final element of the era treated in this chapter which was to inform Neo-Paganism was the interest in popular magic of the day, concerned as it was with practical remedies for specific problems, not esoteric mysteries.⁴⁷ Practitioners, wise (or “cunning”) women and men, dealt in, among other things, curing illnesses, divination,

and overcoming magical spells for their clients. Sympathetic magic involving fire was frequently used; image magic, which involved fashioning a form of a witch who had put a spell upon the client, and inserting needles into it, was also carried out. Practitioners created spells and rites according to their own wishes and the needs of those employing their services.⁴⁸ Cunning folk probably did not work together,⁴⁹ nor did they possess a separate system of religious belief rooted in ancient Pagan times.⁵⁰ As Owen Davies points out, in fact, the cunning-folk were products of the religious cultures of the time and place in which they lived, operating within the social boundaries and belief systems of their own era, not a bygone one. True, in the ancient past there had indeed been Pagan cunning-folk, but, Davis argues, focusing on latter-day cunning-folk's ancient roots is meaningless, as they stemmed from no true archaic, shamanic lineage.⁵¹ Whatever the case, and despite this lack of concrete connection, the focus on popular magic was to affect the practices and beliefs of Neo-Pagans in the twentieth century.

We will now shift our focus to the twentieth century, and examine the manner in which some of the elements cited above were to be combined by some key luminaries in the fifty years or so before modern Paganism appeared. At the turn of the century, in the realm of literature, the works of authors H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, and Kenneth Grahame,⁵² as well as those of W.B. Yeats, George Russell, and D.H. Lawrence,⁵³ were significant, as they either rejected or transformed Christianity, and mixed or substituted concepts associated with ancient Paganism.⁵⁴ Yeats, for example, in 1896 announced the return of the old deities, writing,

The Dagda, with his overflowing cauldron, Lugh, with his spear dipped in poppy juice, lest it rush forth hot for battle, Angus, with his three birds on his shoulder, Bove and his red swine-herd, and all the heroic children of Dana, set up once more their temples of grey stone. Their reign has never ceased, but only waned in

power a little, for the Shee still pass in every wind, and dance and play at hurley, and fight their sudden battles in every hollow and on every hill.⁵⁵

The back-to-nature movements of the era similarly demonstrate a coming together of a number of ideas which had been evolving over the preceding several decades,⁵⁶ one such group was the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, founded in 1916 by Ernest Westlake. Clearly inspired by the idealization of the countryside which had begun in the preceding century, the Order instilled a kinship of nature in young people,⁵⁷ this seen as cure for the unhealthiness of urban living. Significantly, Westlake also appeared to feel the need to free the human spirit and reintegrate people to the natural world. Toward achieving this end, he turned to ancient Pagan literature and gods, citing *The Bacchae*, Euripides' ancient drama about the return of Dionysus to rejuvenate Greece, as inspiration, saying "as the Dionysus worship revived old Hellas, so may the same thing, introduced by the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry, revive the greater Hellas of modern civilization."⁵⁸ Westlake was to later decide, however, that the "Trinity of the Woodcraft" was made up of Pan, Artemis, and Dionysus.⁵⁹ It is important to point out, as does Hutton, that all this was not indicative of a Pagan worldview; rather, the appeal of Paganism was as a means of revitalizing Christianity through dealing with aspects in which Christianity had come to be lacking.⁶⁰

A few decades later, the works and ideas of other key individuals were to have an even more direct influence on and provide even greater inspiration for modern Paganism. One such key figure is Aleister Crowley, leader of the Ordo Templi Orientis, who was to become a larger-than-life figure in later Neo-Pagan culture. Crowley was in all likelihood an atheist or agnostic, being much more interested in magic than religion; he connected his practice of "magick" not to religion but to science, defining "magick" as

“the art of science of causing change in conformity with will.”⁶¹ Crowley once declared that he “wished to bring oriental wisdom to Europe and restore Paganism in a purer form;” however, at no point did he define Paganism, nor did he define this purer form.⁶² Crowley made a number of innovations in the practice and theory of magic, including conceiving of female divinity as assuming the form of but one major goddess (quite like the Romantics before him). He was also an innovator in the use of working tools which Mathers had appropriated from the Masons and adapted for ritual magic. He kept the wand, cup, pentacle dagger, and sword, and added the scourge consecrated oil, a bell to summon those taking part in a rite, a censer to hold sacred fire and scent sacred space, and a book of charms and spells.⁶³ Indeed, in his *Magick in Theory and Practice*, in the chapter entitled “The Formulae of the Elemental Weapons,” Crowley declares that “...most rituals are composite, and contain many formulae which must be harmonized into one.”⁶⁴ He then goes on to consider the magician’s tools, one by one, noting among other things that “the first formula is that of the wand,”⁶⁵ and later that “the dagger will ... appear principally in the banishings, preliminary to the ceremony proper.”⁶⁶ Similarly, in the chapter “Of the Consecrations: With an Account of the Nature and Nurture of the Magical Link,” Crowley outlines the method of consecration, instructing his readers to “Take the wand, or holy oil, and draw upon the object to be consecrated the supreme symbol of the force to which you dedicate it.”⁶⁷ As we will see later, elements such as these were to be of great influence in Neo-Pagan ritual as it was to develop later in the twentieth century.

Robert Graves was another key personality of the era whose thoughts and ideas were to influence contemporary Pagan thought and practice. A respected mainstream

poet, it was his *The White Goddess* of 1948 which was to be a great contribution to the modern Paganism which was to surface later.⁶⁸ In particular, Graves' work added to the evolution of the favourite modern image of the Pagan goddess, presenting as it did a fully formed image of the Triple Moon Goddess, Maiden, Mother, and Crone, a conceptualization which was to become standard in Neo-Pagan thought and ritual.⁶⁹ Indeed, in *The White Goddess*, when speaking of the move of the English poets of his day to voluntarily return to the logic of poetic thought, which involved the use of diction, metre, and theme, Graves writes that,

The Theme, briefly, is the antique story, which falls into thirteen chapters and an epilogue, of the birth, life, death, and resurrection of the God of the Waxing Year; the central chapters concern the God's losing the battle with the God of the Waning Year for love of the capricious and all-powerful Threefold Goddess, their mother, bride and layer-out.⁷⁰

The final personality of the era who was to have an impact on the modern Paganism which was to later surface was Margaret Murray, archaeologist, Egyptologist, and scholar of ancient religion. In 1921, she wrote *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*, in which she postulated a standard Pagan religion which had continued throughout all of Western Europe into the 1600's. The religion was a fertility cult, centring around a horned god who was representative of nature's generative powers; this god was personified as a human being at their rites. She cited that these groups were divided into covens.⁷¹ Indeed, in defining the very term "coven," Murray declares that "the special meaning of the word among the witches is a 'band' or 'company,' who were set apart for the practice of the rites of the religion and for the performance of magical ceremonies; in short, a kind of priesthood."⁷² She continues that "the 'fixed number' among the witches of Great Britain seems to have been thirteen: twelve witches and their officer."⁷³ These

groups celebrated sabbats for times a year, at the old quarter days which began each season. In speaking of them, the British archaeologist writes,

The original celebrations belonged to the May-November year a division of time which follows neither the solstices nor the agricultural seasons; ... there is reason to believe these festivals were connected with the breeding seasons of the flocks and herds. The chief festivals were: in the spring May Eve (April 30), called Roodmas or Rood Day in Britain and Walpurgis-Nacht in Germany; in the autumn, November Eve (October 31), called in Britain Allhallow Eve. Between these two came: in the winter, Candlemas (February 2); and in the summer, the Gule of August (August 1), called Lammas in Britain.⁷⁴

Prominent in the rites of the witches, Murray claimed, were fertility dances.

The witches' dances, taken in conjunction with the dates of the four great Sabbaths of the year, point to the fact that they (also) were intended to promote fertility. There were several forms of ritual dances, varying apparently according to the form of fertility required, whether of crops, animals, or human beings.⁷⁵

Rites, according to Murray, also consisted of feasting, magic, sacrifices, ritualized sexual intercourse, and paying tribute to an individual representing the god.⁷⁶

In 1933, Murray came to write *The God of the Witches*, a sequel to her first work on the topic. It celebrated the old religion, seen as life-affirming and joyous, unlike Christianity's sobriety.⁷⁷ Murray's theories were not received well by scholars as she used source material which was flawed; in fact, much of it has since been disproved by a number of academics.⁷⁸ Despite this, her work was nonetheless widely embraced, appealing as it did to the emotional impulses of the age. As Hutton suggests, in many ways, it adopted the tone of Neo-Paganism and was to contribute greatly to Neo-Pagan practice, which was to surface a few decades later.⁷⁹

We may now consider how all of the above factors were to culminate in the emergence of modern Paganism in the mid-twentieth century. It is Gerald Gardner who is most prominently, inextricably linked with the appearance of modern Pagan witchcraft.

A number of scholars of religion, among them Tanya Luhrmann, argue that modern witchcraft was, in fact, essentially created by Gardner in the 1940's;⁸⁰ this is a contention which will be examined in the pages which follow. Gardner had always had an interest in the supernatural, and had first-hand experience with Freemasonry, spiritualism, Buddhism and indigenous magic. Gardner claimed to have been introduced to Paganism through a woman called "Old Dorothy," whom he met in New Forest, England, in the 1930's. (In fact, the woman was probably "Dafo," a woman with whom Gardner was to work in the 1940's.)⁸¹ Gardner claimed she was the leader of a surviving witch coven of the ancient religion, and likewise claimed to have been initiated into her coven in 1939. Gardner was similarly initiated into Crowley's "Ordo Templi Orientis" at approximately the same time. In 1947, together with Dafo, Gardner formed an organization called "Ancient Crafts Ltd." which bought a building and piece of land in Hertfordshire on which to work magic and perform rituals. As suggested by Hutton, in all likelihood, this is the birthplace of modern Pagan witchcraft.⁸²

In 1949, camouflaged as a novel called *High Magic's Aid*, Gardner outlined some of the witches' rituals and beliefs he claimed to have encountered,⁸³ in particular two initiation rituals; there was, however, no reference to the goddess. Five years later, Gardner wrote the book *Witchcraft Today*, openly informing the world of what he had found. Gardner disclosed a religion which was centred around the celebration of the four quarter days which ushered in the four seasons, and was organized into covens. Indeed, in outlining the particulars of the witches' coven, Gardner writes,

I think that I must make it clear that, as far as my experience goes, while the coven should traditionally have six couples and a leader in the circle, nowadays it

may often have less...If there were, say twenty initiates and enough room, they would probably form two covens each in their own circle with one leader or timekeeper.⁸⁴

He chronicled the veneration of a goddess and god as well as naked dances. His book also gave accounts of feasts made up of consecrated food and beverages. Gardner asserted that practitioners drew a circle within which they worked with a sword or knife, in fact possessing eight ritual tools. Practitioners held a belief in reincarnation, and worked to develop untapped psychic powers. Indeed, in broaching the topic of clairvoyance, Gardner was to declare,

I think that there is something in the nature of an electro-magnetic field surrounding all living bodies, and that is what is seen by some people who call it the aura...I think a witch by her formulae stimulates it, or possibly creates more of it. They say that witches can train their wills to blend this nerve force, or whatever it is, and that their united wills can project this as a beam of force, or that they can use it in other ways to gain clairvoyance, or even to release the astral body. These practices include increasing and quickening the blood supply, or in other cases slowing it down, as well as the use of will power...⁸⁵

It was Gardner's *The Book of Shadows*, however, the collection of instructions and rituals which represented the sacred text of his witch religion, which was his most important work in influencing Neo-Paganism, particularly in the realm of ritual. Written in 1953, Gardner never intended to publish the work; however, he did eventually publish a number of extracts from the book in the years that followed.⁸⁶ Fortunately for scholars on contemporary Paganism, Stewart and Janet Farrar, with the help of Gardner's partner Doreen Valiente, reconstructed a probable "original" text in the 1980's.⁸⁷

Before considering this work, however, another document, "Ye Bok of ye Art Magical," bears brief examination. Most likely written in 1947-1948, it was identified by researcher Aidan Kelly as the precursor of *The Book of Shadows* of 1953, and was probably the ritual book used by the group begun by Gardner and Dafo.⁸⁸ As indicated

by Hutton, the work deals with the importance of magic, the preparation of spaces, tools, and clothing for ritual work, the invoking of spirits, the sanctity of the entire human body, and the power of nudity, binding, and scourging for magical operations. The work deals primarily with ceremonial ritual magic at its beginning, and shifts its focus to witchcraft midway through. Similarly, ritual supplants theory as an area of concentration at the midway point of the work.⁸⁹ It cannot be ascertained whether Gardner transcribed these entries from a pre-existing source, thus being initiated into a pre-existing religion, or wrote them himself, effectively creating his own religion.⁹⁰

As regards the actual contents of the rituals, many relate to the three degrees of initiation into the religion. The outlines of the first two are Masonic, involving binding, blindfolding, a password, entry presentation to the cardinal points, an ordeal, an oath of secrecy, and an explanation of working tools (the main working tool is the black knife, the “athame” which came to be used in Neo-Pagan ritual). The third was symbolic or actual sex magic.⁹¹ A blessing for the consecration of wine was also developed, symbolizing the union of female and male, as the woman dipped the tip of a dagger into a vessel of wine held by a man (a variation of an OTO ritual). Another ritual was the preparation and casting of the magic circle within which the initiations were to occur. The circle was drawn with an athame, sprinkled with exorcised water, and candles were lit. The circle was sealed, the banishing ritual was carried out, and the elemental powers were called in the manner suggested by Eliphas Levi.⁹²

The above synopsis of “Ye Bok” demonstrates that, by the end of 1948, the fundamentals of contemporary Paganism were being established. Between 1949 and 1952, Gardner either wrote or copied the other elements required; he gave the resulting

work the name *The Book of Shadows*, completed in 1953.⁹³ *The Book of Shadows* contained “Ye Bok’s” initiation ceremonies and other rites specifically associated with the witch religion, as well as the new material which had been developed.⁹⁴ The new material was made up of seasonal rituals (the four festivals identified by Murray as the witches’ sabbats), as well as a speech for a priestess who personified the goddess. The fact that these seasonal festivals were added quickly gives rise to the idea that they were copied from a pre-existing source.⁹⁵ As pointed out by Hutton, quotations from Crowley’s Gnostic Mass are inserted directly, or are paraphrased, in the invocations prescribed for each; also, the Hallowe’en ritual commences with the entire Salatin’s invocation from “Le Miracle de Theophile,” and those for May and August Eves both include a verse from “Puck’s Song” by Kipling. Other motifs appear to be taken from Murray’s work⁹⁶ (not surprisingly, as Gardner was, as pointed out by Tanya Luhrmann, likely profoundly influenced by Murray’s historical account of witchcraft as an organized fertility religion pre-dating Christianity).⁹⁷ These included accounts of witches riding brooms and high priests brandishing wands. There is also probable personal contribution, such as the development of dance and games, likely to balance out the solemn nature of invocation.⁹⁸ Late additions included a preface, and an invocation to the goddess.⁹⁹

These additions, in particular as regards the seasonal festivals, show a marked move toward gender equity when compared to earlier writings. It is taken for granted that a high priest and high priestess as well will be at the head of the coven.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, there exists a greater focus on deities than had been the case in earlier works, such as the initiation rites. In those early rites, the goddess “Airdia,” (Aradia) is mentioned briefly, but comes to be much more highly developed in the seasonal festivals. As observed by

Hutton, at Hallowe'en the god is addressed as giver of death and keeper of its realm, also presiding over February Eve, and is represented by the high priest. It is the goddess who presides on May and August Eves, being the bringer of fruitfulness.¹⁰¹ (Other additions to the book were to come later in the decade, as Gardner's colleague Doreen Valiente improved the seasonal rituals, and as the solstices and equinoxes began to assume their position beside the quarter days which Murray had stipulated as the most important festivals for witches).¹⁰² In 1958, when Gardner's coven asked if the festivals for the equinoxes and solstices could be accorded the same status as the quarter celebrations, he agreed, and the eightfold year as Neo-Pagans know it was created.¹⁰³

At any rate, the above is the body of rituals which existed when Gardner announced the witch religion to the world in the 1950's, just at the time that the Witchcraft and Vagrancy Acts of 1951 were repealed. As indicated by Hutton, it bears mentioning that even if Gardner did compile the rituals himself, he still did not "make them up," in the sense that the cultural forces which had been evolving over the preceding few centuries came together in Gardner to produce a potent response to the needs they represented.¹⁰⁴ A related but differing perspective on the issue, argued by Aidan Kelly, is that it makes no difference, in fact, whether or not Gardner was initiated into a pre-existing coven. Either way, he invented a new religion, a "living system," and modern covens have adopted a great deal of it because it fulfills a need. The reform is made up of these new concepts, the primary ones being the worship of the goddess and a new way of working magic.¹⁰⁵ In any case, in 1954, Gardner gave the name "Wica" to the witch religion (later to be spelled "Wicca"), from the Proto-Indo European meaning

“to bend or shape;” it came to signify one who shapes or transforms things, a reference to the witch’s ability to effect change.¹⁰⁶

Having examined the weighty contributions made to contemporary Paganism by Gerald Gardner, mention must be made of the fact that there is speculation regarding the existence of non-Gardnerian witchcraft before 1960. Many claims were made by individuals claiming to be following ancient, unbroken traditions; these included claims by E.W. Liddell, Charles Cardell, Rhiannon Ryall, John P. Williams, and Robert Cochrane. Two figures in particular merit lengthier treatment, the first because her claims, if valid, would indicate the existence of an organized Wiccan network circa 1940, and the latter due mainly to the influence he was to exert on contemporary Paganism; these personalities are, respectively, Sybil Leek and Alexander Sanders. Sybil Leek became known to the public in 1962, the year she announced herself as a witch and leader of a coven. Leek claimed to be descended from a family of witches.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, in her autobiography, *Diary of a Witch*, Leek states,

I knew that several members of my family met four times a year to celebrate religious rites and that these meetings were obligatory for a witch to attend. They were the Great Sabbats, which took place on the night of February 1; on the night of the last day of April; at Lammas, the first evening in August; and, most important of all, on the last night of October, Halloween being the Celtic New Year.¹⁰⁸

She also purports to have been trained in the family tradition as a youngster by her grandmother, whose athame she had inherited.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, her grandmother was to figure prominently in her claims to inheriting a family tradition of witchcraft; in *Diary of a Witch*, she declares, “During the lessons which my grandmother gave to me, I began to realize that I was inheriting a very difficult history which would affect my whole life.”¹¹⁰

Leek also states that she was initiated into Wicca as a teenager at an international reunion of witches in France. In her autobiography, she was to write,

Grandmother told me that...the time had come to undergo initiation...In France I joined my elderly relation. The hills above the Gorge du Loup were an appropriate place for witches to meet.¹¹¹

Leek goes on to describe the initiation, making reference to “incantations asking for protection to all within the circle,” “vessels containing water and salt (which) were consecrated,” “the ritual sword and the blades of the athames,” “an oath to fidelity to the religion of witchcraft,” and “ritual dances and incantations.”¹¹²

It is also significant that Leek also states that Aleister Crowley was a family friend, and that she had been trained by him as well. In actual fact, Crowley’s diaries, thorough works indeed, show no evidence of a relationship with Leek or her family. If indeed this relationship is a fabrication by Leek, it is also highly possible that her initiation into an international Wiccan network was similarly not based in fact. Indeed, no evidence of this organization has even been mentioned by other Wiccans, and may well have been a creation.¹¹³

Alexander Sanders was the founder of the Alexandrian tradition of Wicca, claiming that it began in 1933 when, at seven years of age, he happened upon his grandmother in her home, nude, standing in a circle; the elderly woman then initiated the boy into the Craft,¹¹⁴ young Alexander later copying his Book of Shadows from his grandmother’s.¹¹⁵ As regards early influences in the realm of religious belief, it appears that Sanders was exposed to spiritualism in his formative experiences of the occult, being introduced to it by his mother.¹¹⁶ In 1965 he formed a coven, and as Hutton points out, although the tradition of witchcraft which he was to develop with his groups had the

basic ceremonial framework of the Gardnerian *Book of Shadows*, there were important differences.¹¹⁷ The god-name most frequently used was “Karnayna,” not Gardner’s “Cernunnos;” this likely was a misunderstanding of “Dhu’l Karnain,” Arabic for “the horned one,” mentioned in Murray’s *The God of the Witches*.¹¹⁸ Moreover, Alexandrian covens included a somewhat stronger focus on ceremonial magic than had Gardner,¹¹⁹ and placed greater emphasis on techniques of practical magic (including clairvoyance and the use of charms) than did other Pagans of the time;¹²⁰ Sanders also felt that his initiates should regard the occult as a range of activities and ideas which each group could combine based on their own wishes and needs.¹²¹ One of the lasting legacies of the founder of the Alexandrian tradition was to make Wicca more easily accessible to homosexual men, ending the animosity toward this group which Gardner had planted in his *The Book of Shadows*, which reflected the Wiccan emphasis on gender polarity. Sanders continued to train initiates in Alexandrian Wicca until his death in 1988.¹²²

It is next to impossible to say with absolute certainty whether or not any of the individuals or groups of individuals mentioned above can legitimately claim ancient, non-Gardnerian roots for their Pagan traditions. Indisputable is the fact, however, that by the 1960’s, many groups all over England existed claiming origins independent of Gardner. Identifiable styles of Pagan witchcraft were coming into being.

In the present work, we have focused primarily on one country, Britain, in examining the events, ideas, and ways of thinking which were to contribute to the appearance of contemporary Paganism in the middle of the twentieth century. This is the only manner in which the task at hand could be accomplished, as it was in that country that the factors combined which were to lead to the emergence of Neo-Paganism, and,

indeed, it was Britain in which this emergence occurred. Mention must be made, however, of American contemporary Paganism, as it is the United States which has, since the 1970's, been the centre of the movement; not surprisingly, therefore, America has had an impact on the shape and direction Neo-Paganism and its concomitant rituals have taken.

The writings of Murray, Graves, and Gardner were widely read in the United States in the 1960's and 1970's, yet the concept of witchcraft developed by some of the leading Americans was very different from Wicca imported from England. In the U.S.A., it was female mystery religion, standing in contrast with the British gender balance in creative polarity.¹²³ As pointed out by Hutton, it was Starhawk (Miriam Simos) who bridged the gap between the two approaches.¹²⁴ The English historian continues that Starhawk was trained by Gardnerians, then initiated into an American brand of Pagan witchcraft which had absorbed some material from Wicca; as Hutton phrases the matter,

(Starhawk) showed how the coven could be used as a training group in which women could be liberated, men re-educated, and new forms of interpersonal relationships explored, free of gender stereotypes and power structures. She reinterpreted magic in terms of human psychology, as a set of techniques for self-discovery, self-fulfillment, and the realization of true individual human potential.¹²⁵

Indeed, in *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk declares,

Under patriarchy, men, while encouraged to expect a great deal of nurturing care from women, are taught not to admit their need for nurturing, their need to be passive at times, to be weak, to lean on another. The God, in Witchcraft, embodies longing and desire for union with the prime nurturing force. Instead of seeking unlimited mothering from actual, living women, men in Witchcraft are encouraged to identify with the God and, through Him to attain union with the Goddess, whose mother-love knows no bounds. The Goddess is both an external and internal force: When her image is taken into a man's mind and heart, She becomes part of him. He can connect with his own nurturing qualities, with the inner Muse who is a source of unfading inspiration¹²⁶

In turning our attention to the course modern Paganism was to take in the closing decades of the twentieth century, it is accurate to say that from the 1970's on, there was great expansion, and a multiplication of varieties of modern Paganism. The religions of the ancient Norse and Anglo-Saxons developed, and the Fellowship of Isis was established as an organization for celebrating goddess-focused traditions.¹²⁷ In the late 1980's, Pagan Druidry expanded as well. These movements were encouraged by Wicca, and were rooted in Wicca to a great extent.¹²⁸ By the end of the decade, the potential was there for a national alliance of Pagan traditions; the Pagan Federation (originally known as the Pagan Front), founded in 1970, was reestablished in 1988, bigger and more highly-structured. By the 1990's, all those strands which had been intact in the 1960's, Gardnerian, Alexandrian, Cochranian, as well as independent traditions, were alive and well, as were their offshoots. Wiccans came to associate themselves with the heritage of classical antiquity, as well as Celtic and northern literatures, while in popular discourse, the term "witch" came to be replaced by "Pagan."¹²⁹

Two points which have been established in examining the roots of modern Paganism in this chapter bear re-iteration and elaboration before bringing the chapter to a close: first, a self-aware modern Paganism had emerged in Great Britain by the mid-twentieth century, and it was a tradition which drew upon the practices of ancient religion. In a coming together of a variety of forces which had been gaining in power over the preceding century and a half, the founders of Neo-Paganism consciously looked back to the ancient past and did one of two things (or, most likely did both): In some cases, they identified and adopted remnants of ancient practices which were still alive in some form in the modern era. These threads of ancient traditions included a reverence

for the art and literature of the ancient world, as well as practices embedded in folk-rites or in Christian traditions. Alternately, the founders of Neo-Paganism were inspired by certain ancient practices which had ceased to exist and reconstructed them, altering and adding to them in ways they deemed desirable. Regardless of the manner in which this occurred, the indisputable fact remains that the Neo-Paganism which was to emerge was rooted in ancient traditions, both by direct lineage and by inspiration.

The second principal insight to emerge from this chapter also merits restating: Neo-Paganism is remarkable in the manner in which it has eclectically mined ideas from a myriad of sources. As we have seen, sources as diverse as Romanticism, Freemasonry, Theosophy, and high ritual magic, to name but a few, served to inspire early Neo-Pagans and inform their practice. This eclecticism is a quality which still characterizes Neo-Paganism and its rituals today, as many adherents find inspiration in the practices of indigenous peoples, eastern religion, and mysticism, among other sources. This is a point that will become increasingly clear in our next chapter, as we begin to consider the rituals of modern-day Pagan groups as they mark the two primary Neo-Pagan festivals, Samhain and Beltane.

CHAPTER 3

THE FESTIVAL OF SAMHAIN

Having looked at the Samhain and Beltane festivals as they were celebrated by the ancient Celts, and having examined the evolution of contemporary Paganism (with a focus on ritual), we will now turn our attention to the ways in which present-day Pagans celebrate the two festivals treated in the present work, beginning in this chapter with Samhain. While carrying out field research in the study of the Samhain festival, data was collected from three separate celebrations carried out by three separate groups in the greater Montreal area. Each of these celebrations was observed by the author of the current study, and interviews were conducted with both the organizers of and other participants in each celebration regarding their points of view on the activities in which they engaged. The first group consisted of a number of students and teachers at a school of Paganism in Montreal. Four of the third-level students at this school had the task of organizing and leading a Samhain ritual as part of the requirements for the course in which they were enrolled. Roughly twenty men and women participated in this ritual, seven of whom were interviewed for the present study. Of this collection of individuals, four were teachers at the school (one man and three women, one of whom was the school's owner), two were from among the four third-level students responsible for organizing the ritual (both female), and one was another male student at the school.

The second group involved in this research was again approximately twenty strong, being a Pagan society based at a Montreal post-secondary educational institution; the ritual they held was a teaching ritual, one designed to convey to those unfamiliar with

Neo-Pagan practice what contemporary Pagan ritual involves, specifically the one marking Samhain. Those in attendance were members of the organization as well as interested onlookers from the student body, some of whom were, much like the author of this work, collecting data for research purposes. Four of the members of the organization in question were interviewed for the current study; one was the head organizer of the ritual, while three others were participants (one member of the group who was not in attendance was interviewed as well). Three are female and two are male.

The final group included in the present study was a relatively new, French-language, province-wide Wiccan organization; the ritual performed by this group was a public one co-organized by the leader of the organization and another individual. Sixteen men and women attended the ritual; some were members of the organization, while others were simply interested outsiders. The co-organizers of the ritual (one male and one female) were interviewed, as well as one other male participant.

The data obtained from the field research will be organized into three sections in this chapter. As an introduction, the first will be a brief examination of the perspectives of Neo-Pagans on the general significance of the Samhain festival. This information will come from interviews conducted with celebrants in (and organizers of) each ritual. The second section will be a descriptive, phenomenological account of a single “synthetic” ritual combining elements of the three markings of Samhain observed in this study, focusing on the pre-ritual, ritual, and post-ritual stages. (Significantly, the “ritual” stage will itself be looked at as consisting of three parts: the opening, the central portion, and the closing.) This information will come both from observations of the celebrations, and, to a lesser extent, from interviews with organizers and participants. In an effort to

come to a clear understanding of the character of each group, an examination of the manner in which each of them explored the common aspects outlined in the combined ritual account will be carried out; likewise, a consideration of the ways in which each group included elements not appearing in the synthetic ritual will also be made. In the final section of this chapter, a functional analysis will be employed, as the significance and function of the three celebrations for their leaders and all those in attendance will be explored; this will provide us with insights into the ways in which the events under examination were meaningful to the men and women who participated in them. Once again, this will be based on the interviews conducted with the celebrants and the organizers of each celebration.

Participants in the present study were asked in what ways the Samhain festival was significant to them in order to obtain a general sense of what these individuals might be looking for in the rituals of which they were to partake. At the outset, most but not all of the men and women participating in the current study characterized Samhain as one of the most important festivals celebrated by modern Pagans. By and large, interviewees cite similar key concepts when discussing Samhain; chief among these is the idea of Samhain marking the end of the old year and beginning of the new. This is rooted in the fact that this festival ushers in the beginning of the dark half of the year, a time at which death and decay are visible in nature, and new life is in its very inception stage. As such, Samhain is viewed by most Pagans as the time to acknowledge activities which have come to a close and individuals who have died. Charlotte, owner of the school mentioned above and member of the Black Forest Clan, a Wiccan group with a Celtic and Germanic bent, expresses this idea in commenting that Samhain means,

Bringing things to a closure, marking the end of one year to go into a period of rest, until we have the beginning of the next year. It's essentially our new year. But as we're marking things that have died, or are dying, it's an honouring of the dead as well, and the concept of death. For some people, it refers to an individual, someone who has died. In some cases, it could be the death of an activity that you have been working on, or a project, or the closure of a friendship, and you need to have closure and make peace with yourself over an issue. (A-1, 13/11/2003)¹

Karen, a teacher at the school and also a member of the Black Forest Clan, echoes the sentiment, stating that,

Samhain is extremely important to me for something that a lot of people are uncomfortable with: Samhain is when we mourn our dead. It's the end of the life cycle. Winter is that period of no growth. We look outside and the trees look dead, and the earth is frozen, and there's no life that we can see. "Dead" doesn't just refer to the people we've lost or the pets we've lost; it also refers to projects that have come to a close, relationships that have passed away, opportunities that are gone. (A-2, 03/12/2003)

This focus on honouring the dead at Samhain extends into an emphasis on reverence for ancestors, another prominent idea cited by many Neo-Pagans. Paula, a member of the university organization who has performed a self-initiation into Wicca, and who practices a mixture of Greco-Roman traditions, Hinduism, Jewish mysticism, and contemporary Paganism, declares that "Samhain is particularly important. It gives me the chance to think about my ancestors." (B-1, 20/11/2003)

Andrew, founder of the Wiccan organization who follows no particular tradition within Wicca, similarly remarks that at Samhain, the remembrance of one's forbears is a primary concern. He simply declares, "It's a time to honour our ancestors." (C-1, 17/03/2004)

Indeed, a number of the men and women interviewed in the current study believe that at Samhain, the realm of the ancestral dead, the "otherworld," is highly accessible. Given the death and decay in the natural world at this point of the year, the domain of

deceased loved ones can be penetrated most easily. As put by Andrew, “It’s the time that the veil between our world and the world of the dead is the thinnest.” (C-1, 17/03/2004)

A number of the men and women interviewed also identify the elimination of negativity from one’s life as an important theme at Samhain, given that it marks the closure of the old year. An essential step in this process, many contemporary Pagans say, is to first take stock of what has happened in the preceding twelve months. As Charlotte explains,

Samhain is very much a self-reflection. You’re honouring the gods, you’re honouring your ancestors, but you’re also doing this deep reflection on the self, which is something very similar to what you would do on a dark moon esbat [a moon ritual celebrated by many Neo-Pagans]. (A-1, 13/11/2003)

Indeed, the matter of pondering issues from the past and reaching insights is a concern expressed by a number of present-day Pagans. Having performed this form of self-examination, the time is then ripe to start anew and wipe the slate clean for the new year. Andrew describes it by saying, “It’s a time to turn the page and rid ourselves of negative things.” (C-1, 17/03/2004)

As a closing note on Neo-Pagan perspectives on the importance of Samhain, we may consider Karen’s view of the ritual accompanying the Samhain festival (and, in fact, all Neo-Pagan ritual): it is tantamount to therapy enabling one to cope with life’s obstacles. As she phrases the matter,

In our society today, because we move so fast, we don’t give ourselves time to grieve for all the things that we should grieve for. Samhain is the time that I can allow myself to sit there and remember all things that have passed, and the things that I regret, the things that I need to grieve for. As a result, Samhain is often the most emotional of all the seasonal rituals that you find in Neo-Paganism. (A-2, 03/12/2003)

Having examined the views of Samhain held by a number of contemporary Pagans, we will now provide an account of the “synthetic” Samhain ritual which will serve as the foundation of the remainder of this chapter.

When interviewed, the co-organizers of the ritual outlined a number of steps required in completing the preparatory stage, among them the importance of taking care of “nuts and bolts” matters, including the division of labour (who would provide the decorations, tools, and props needed in the ritual, not to mention the actual creation of certain props), as well as the food to be shared following the event. Also significant was the matter of who was to assume which role in the ritual. The crucial matter of choosing the actual themes to focus upon in the ritual, and the manner in which those ideas were to be explored, was likewise mentioned. As explained by one interviewee, energy is drawn up in a ritual for a particular purpose; it is of great importance to determine how to act upon this energy. A number of themes associated with Samhain were researched by group members, such as the overlap of this world and the otherworld, divination, and reflection; finally, two themes were decided upon: the honouring of the dead and the banishing of negativity. Organizers also spoke of the need to rehearse as essential in the period leading up to the festival.

During the opening of their ritual proper, organizers first purified, in the name of the mother goddess and the father god, the working area in which the proceedings were to be held; this was done with consecrated salt, water, fire, and incense (each representing one of the four elements). They then took the necessary steps in preparing celebrants for participation in the ritual, including briefing them on precisely what was expected of

them during the proceedings. The magic circle in which the Samhain rites were to be performed was then cast as the following proclamation was made:

These are the limits of the sacred circle,
A line between worlds,
A circle of protection
Which no negative energy may penetrate.

The calling of the quarters, consisting of the invocation of the elemental spirits of the four cardinal points, was then done. The element associated with that particular cardinal point was placed in an appropriate part of the circle: salt (representing earth) in the north, incense (symbolizing air) in the east, a candle (signifying fire) in the south, and a bowl of water in the west. The following recitation was made:

Oh, guardian of the tower of the north
Ancient spirit of earth
I invoke your presence in this circle
Protect it and imbue it with your powers.
Be welcome in our circle, oh element of earth.

Similar recitations were made for the elements of air, fire, and water.

The charge of the goddess and god was next performed as the deities were invoked for their presence and protection in the proceedings, beginning with the goddess.

Welcome Black Isis, Hecate, Cerridwin, Persephone.
Join us at this time. In the name of goodness and mercy
And the holy power grant your protection through this year,
Bless us with your wisdom, your strength, your good.
So mote it be!

When invoking the god, the names of the deities were changed (to Anubis, Hermes, Cernunnos, and Hades), but the recitation remained the same.

The final aspect of the opening stage of the proceedings involved the raising of power, a rite whose purpose was to create the energy necessary to carry out the ritual.

The opening stage thus completed, the central portion of the ritual, the “meat,” as it were, was undertaken. The honouring of the dead was the first theme to be explored. A text, somewhat didactic in nature, was read aloud by one of the organizers, a text dealing with the significance of Samhain. The descent of the goddess to the underworld was recounted; the text went on to speak of the fact that Samhain constitutes the death of the seasonal cycle, the final turn of the earthly wheel of the year. Celebrants were told that death is merely the end of the physical body, as no ending is forever; the spirit is eternal. The text continued that after one’s physical death, the spirit will begin anew in another incarnation.

Organizers continued by telling participants that it was an opportune time to release the soul of a loved one who had passed away over the course of the preceding year, and to allow it to pass into invisible realms, unburdened by pain. Celebrants were asked to share with the other men and women in attendance the name of a departed loved one, a personal recollection related to death. As this was done, a drum was played as a chant was repeated.

Blessings be upon the dead that know
Blessings be upon the dead that guard
Blessings be upon the dead that are.

Individuals then proceeded, in turn, to speak of the death of a friend or family member which they had experienced.

The first half of the core of the Samhain ritual completed, the next portion, focusing on the theme of the banishing of negativity, duly commenced. Once again, a didactic text was read aloud, as organizers explained that Samhain is a new year for witches and Neo-Pagans, and that before embarking on a new year full of challenges,

they had to end the old year by banishing any negativity which may have attached itself to them over the previous year. Celebrants were asked to bring to mind one particular aspect of the outgoing year which was problematic for them, or a habit which they wished to break. The chant which follows was recited to transform negative to positive:

Oh wisdom of the moon
 Goddess of the starry night
 Transform what afflicts us
 That the energy may be inverted
 From darkness to light
 From bad to good
 From death to life
 So mote it be!

With this, the central part of the proceedings was completed, and organizers set about closing the ritual; this was done in the reverse order from the way in which it had been opened. First, the deities were thanked for their presence during the ritual, beginning with the god.

We thank you, Anubis, Hermes, Cernunnos, Hades,
 For blessing us with your wisdom, strength, and goodness
 On this blessed day.
 Stay if you will, go if you must.
 Hail and farewell!

The goddess was then thanked in the same manner, as only the deities' names were changed (Black Isis, Hecate, Cerridwin, and Persephone).

Following this, the elementals associated with the four cardinal points were thanked in turn and then dismissed, beginning with the element of water.

Oh, ancient spirit of water
 I thank you for your presence in this place
 Stay among us if you so desire
 May the power accompany you if you must leave.

The same rite was then performed for the elements of fire, air, and earth.

Finally, the circle was decast, this signified by the ringing of a bell, with the proclamation

The circle is open
But never broken.
Merry we meet
Merry we part
Merry we meet again!

The ritual over, a meal (or “feast”) was held at which celebrants not only ate and drank, but mingled and socialized as well. Contacts appeared to be made, and new friendships seemed to be forged as well. A number of topics were discussed, ranging from the ritual experience and issues related to the group itself to more personal matters.

Having provided a single account of the October 31 ritual, drawing upon the three rituals observed in the current study, we will now examine any important variations in the manner in which each of the groups carried out its ritual, as well as any significant additional elements each group may have incorporated into its marking of Samhain. First, in considering the preparatory stage of the ritual, we observe two differences of note, the first related to the distribution of the work to be done. At the school, the four students who led the ritual were responsible for making all the preparations themselves. At the university-based group, one individual, the chief organizer, delegated the various tasks which were to be completed leading up to the ritual, and had ample help from members of the organization. As regards the Wiccan organization, one individual in particular, who was to assume the role of high priest, did the majority of the work needed to prepare for the ritual, with the help of his partner.

The varying manners in which the three groups prepared for the celebrations they held can most likely be explained by a close consideration of the groups themselves. The

students at the school were organizing a ritual in order to fulfill the requirements for the course they were taking; this included not only performing the ritual, but preparing for it as well. The university-based society was, at the time of the Samhain ritual, a well-established body with a number of members; given this, it was likely relatively easy for the chief organizer to call upon a number of experienced individuals to fulfill the tasks required. The Wiccan organization, conversely, was, at the point at which the ritual was held, a relatively new organization without a large membership base. Consequently, the chief organizer did not, in all likelihood, have the luxury of drawing upon a bank of individuals to perform the necessary tasks to prepare for the ritual, having to do them alone, with the help of his partner.

Not unrelated to the above-mentioned matter is the issue of deciding which individuals were to assume the four roles in the calling of the quarters during the ritual; again, this appears to have been handled in different manners by each group. Organizers of the ritual at the school agreed upon who was to assume each role long before the day of the celebration. The designation of particular individuals as quarter callers was not entirely done in advance within the university group, as it was not known precisely which group members would be in attendance the night of the celebration; experience, however, was a prime consideration when designating quarter callers immediately prior to the ritual. The Wiccan organization did not assign any quarter callers in advance, instead asking for volunteers among those in attendance at the ritual proper.

Once again, these differences can most likely be accounted for by examining the natures of the three groups under study. The individuals leading the ritual at the school numbered four; given that four individuals are needed to call the quarters, they were

perfectly suited to performing the task themselves. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, given that they were leading the ritual as part of their course requirements, it is likely that they wished to be very well-prepared in every aspect of what they did, and were sure to establish details such as this in advance. The university organization is a well-established group made up largely of experienced practitioners of contemporary Paganism; given this, members were in all probability comfortable with the idea of making final decisions regarding the quarter callers shortly before the ritual, confident that any one of a number of members, well-versed in what had to be done, would be able to assume these roles. The Wiccan organization, again due to the fact that it was a fledgling group, did not, perhaps, have a pool of individuals from which to draw in order to fill the roles in question, and thus decided to choose individuals from among those attending the ritual.

Upon careful analysis of the ritual itself, despite the inarguable commonalities among the groups, there were indeed certain variations in the opening stage; two such differences are significant and merit greater treatment. First, as members of the Wiccan organization admitted and seated ritual participants, they did so on an alternating gender basis; this was an approach not taken by either of the other two groups under study. The underlying element in this manner of admitting and seating people is an accent on gender polarity and complementation. In all likelihood, the organizers of this group subscribed to the idea that it is through the judicious blending of male and female energy that power is generated in ritual. While this male-female balance is undeniably an element of ritual in most Neo-Pagan groups (as demonstrated by the calling of both the gods and goddesses), not all groups emphasize it to such a degree. The focus that this particular

organization had may indicate a following of the Gardnerian approach to ritual, in which the polarity of the genders is of great importance.

The second difference of note in the opening stage of the ritual proper was the raising of power. Many Pagan groups perform particular rites in order to create the energy necessary to carry out the ritual in question, forming what is often termed a “cone of power;” a number of groups do this through the use of singing and dancing. As regards the three groups under consideration in the current study, we note that the university group chose to raise power through walking a circle, while members of the Wiccan organization did so by having participants, while standing in a circle, raise both arms and touch palms with the person on either side of them; organizers of the ritual at the school did not perform a rite to raise energy.

When considering possible explanations for the above, in all probability, personal preferences and, significantly, practical considerations explain these variations. The school held its ritual in an area in which extravagant movement was not encouraged, this due to weak floorboards in the room in which the ritual was held, and organizers possibly felt raising energy in the traditional manner was a risk. The Wiccan group was to meet in precisely the same location as the first group, and members perhaps chose to adapt the power-raising rite to suit their environment. Finally, the university group met in a setting in which celebrants did not have to take into account a weakly-constructed floor, but did have to cope with the issue of limited space; this probably explains why they were able to move about more in their creation of energy, but had to do so more slowly than is sometimes done, as limited space was not conducive to quick, wide movement.

As regards the central portion of the ritual, the treatment and expression of the common themes central to Samhain by each of the groups differed in some significant ways. In their honouring of the dead, the leaders of the ritual at the school read a text proclaiming that death is not the end of life, but a release into Avalon to await a new incarnation, and asked celebrants, one by one, in remembrance of a dead loved one, to place an apple cut-out with the name of that person on a representation of the “Tree of Avalon.” The leaders of the ritual held by the university Pagan organization celebrated death (and, significantly, rebirth) in a different manner, through a number of different means: the presence of a crone (representing death and the outgoing year) and a maiden (symbolizing rebirth and the new year) in the ritual, these roles enacted by participants; the reading of a text identifying Samhain as a time of death, but also as a transitory period to new life; a call to participants to acknowledge all that has ended in the preceding year, including the loss of loved ones, and to publicly announce this loss; a recounting of the mythical descent of Persephone, and the use of a pomegranate to symbolize death; a call to reflect upon new beginnings and the year to come; the use of an apple to symbolize rebirth; and an open discussion of the deep meaning of Samhain. The Wiccan organization dealt with the motif of honouring the dead in their ritual through the reading of a passage regarding the descent of the goddess, asking each celebrant to speak aloud and share, in turn (as a “talking stick” was passed around the circle), the story of a loved one who had been lost, and the recitation of a prayer to the gods focusing on the death of the sun god, ancestors, and descendents.

When considering the variation in each of the above rituals which honoured the dead, certain observations must be made which are related to the character of each group.

A key point of note regarding the ritual held by organizers at the school is that their exploration of the theme of death was a thorough but not particularly long one. This most likely stems from the fact that students performed the ritual as part of their course requirements; as such, they were very conscious of meeting those requirements, which included respecting time limitations. That the ritual dealt with the Tree of Avalon is perhaps indicative of a Celtic bent in their practice, as the Tree of Avalon is a concept from that particular background. This also speaks explicitly of reincarnation, possibly demonstrating a strong focus on that concept in the belief system of this group, something which members wished to convey in their ritual.

The ritual held by the university group was considerably longer than that of the school. This is most likely rooted in the fact that theirs was a teaching ritual, one designed to acquaint the uninitiated with the basic tenets of Neo-Paganism in general, and Samhain in particular. Although all three rituals under consideration were undoubtedly constructed in such a way as to enlighten those in attendance, organizers of this ritual clearly had a particular interest in conveying a great deal of information, an objective which takes a certain amount of time to achieve. Indeed, their means of marking the festival did indeed assume a didactic shape, the emphasis on teaching being an important backdrop to what was being done at all times. The texts which were read regarding the significance of Samhain were written in such a way as to clearly transmit information to listeners; similarly, the passing around the room of the pomegranate (and its identification as a symbol of death) and the apple (with its label as signifying new life) was also meant to convey lessons to participants and onlookers. Finally, the open discussion (which resembled a “question and answer period”) clearly indicated

organizers' goal of educating the unversed in the ways of Neo-Pagans, particularly as present-day Pagans celebrate Samhain.

A point of note regarding the university society which cannot be explained merely by the fact that theirs was a teaching ritual is their focus not only on the death of the old year and the concomitant need for closure, but on the birth of the new year as well. Indeed, while the other two groups touched peripherally on this theme, the university-based group was the only one to explore it in any detail. Their invitation to participants to publicly announce any "new beginnings," as well as their focus on the apple as a symbol of rebirth, clearly expressed a concern with conveying the idea that new life springs from all death. This may simply be because their ritual was longer, giving them the opportunity to explore such themes in more detail, or it may be indicative of a slightly different point of view of the Samhain festival.

The ritual of the Wiccan organization, like that of the university group, focused on the descent of the goddess, but in a much less detailed, less didactic manner. This likely indicates that group leaders, while holding the myth to be important, did not wish to make it (or the formal teaching of its insights) the focal point of what they did. Instead, the Wiccan group placed greater emphasis than did the other two groups on each participant actively contributing to the ritual through speaking, in turn, of a deceased loved one. This may simply be a matter of personal choice, or perhaps stems from the fact that the organization was a new one, and leaders felt that providing individuals with the opportunity to actively participate in the proceedings, thus creating a somewhat celebrant-centred ritual, was an effective manner of attracting people.

The manner in which the school and the Wiccan group chose to approach the banishing of negativity (a theme not explored by the university group) differed as well; analysis of this may again provide insights into the personalities of the two groups. The co-organizers of the ritual at the school expressed this theme by reading a text concerning the importance of ridding oneself of all things negative before embarking upon the new year, then asking celebrants to focus their negativity on a communal burning candle, thereby dissolving the negative aspects of the previous year; they also asked participants to repeat the exercise at home on an individual basis. The province-wide Wiccan organization dealt with the matter of eliminating the negative aspects of the previous year through asking participants to write an undesirable habit on a paper, then, one by one, burn it in a common fire.

That ritual co-organizers from the school chose to achieve the goal of banishing negativity through burning a candle infused with communal negativity, while the Wiccan organization did so by asking participants to write and physically burn a representation of the negativity, may be insignificant, but is perhaps telling. The communal aspect of the banishing by the students of the school may indicate a belief that there is great value in bringing about transformation as a group and employing the “group mind” in ritual. In part, organizers may also have simply felt that the manner they chose was the most straightforward method of achieving the desired goal, thereby fulfilling their academic task.

That the leaders of the Wiccan group chose to ask individuals to physically write and burn symbols of negativity may be without serious implications, or might suggest a belief that the concrete, tangible quality of that act makes more “real” the elimination of

the undesirable quality from one's life. As indicated earlier, it may also be suggestive of the fact that as a new organization, the province-wide Wiccan organization was seeking members, and may have felt that having celebrants actively participate in the ritual was a way to achieve that goal.

It is perhaps significant that the university-based group chose not to focus on this theme, instead exploring the twin themes of reflection upon the events of the previous year, and the divining the events of the next. This was carried out primarily through the use of a scrying mirror at two points during the ritual, as the men and women in attendance were invited to alternately look back at the outgoing year and look ahead to the next; a speech by one of the organizers accompanied each use of the mirror. The university society's focus on these particular themes could be a consequence of the fact that this was a teaching ritual; group leaders may have felt that the concepts of reflection and divination lend themselves more easily to a didactic context, particularly to the discussion of Samhain which was to be held later in the ritual. This choice could, however, simply have been an issue of personal preference.

An analysis of the closing stage of the Samhain ritual reveals a high degree of uniformity among the three groups. The very minor differences in the manner in which each group went about doing this are insignificant to the point of not meriting mention, as they are in no way indicative of any true differences among the groups, particularly as regards matters within the scope of this work.

Even more than was the case in the pre-ritual stage, the post-ritual proceedings bore remarkable similarity to each other, as a "feast" was held by each of the three groups; there appeared to be no differences of note in the ways this was carried out. It

perhaps bears mentioning that in the case of the Wiccan organization, however, there seemed to be a greater incidence of new relationships being forged than old ones being renewed, not surprising given that the group was a relatively new one at the time.

On the subject of the feast, as an important “sidebar,” we may briefly consider that phenomenon before leaving altogether our accounts of the Samhain rituals. Interviews with celebrants from all groups indicate that, by and large, Neo-Pagans believe that this sharing of food serves two purposes. First, it is a means of “grounding;” many interviewees in the present study spoke of the need to “unwind” or “come down” from the energized state created by the ritual itself. Eating and drinking, interviewees indicated, provides that service, making it an essential rite. The second purpose of the communal meal is that it affords all those in attendance the opportunity to socialize and meet each other. Interviewees stated that at feasts, it is indeed important to re-establish contact with old friends and form new networks and connections. The discussions at feasts seemingly range from friendly chats to meatier conversations about religious matters and reflections on the experience just shared. When interviewed, some Neo-Pagans went so far as to say that the feast is an essential part of the ritual itself in that it is an assembly of individuals who have come together for an important event, thus fulfilling the basic human need of belonging. For many, the fact that all this takes place with the backdrop of food is important as well, as through the preparation and sharing of food, people share of themselves.

We will now turn our attention to the function of ritual by examining the ways in which the marking of Samhain was a significant experience to celebrants; through this, we will continue to refine our image of the ways in which the ritual experience in more

general terms is important to practitioners. Participants were pointedly asked about the significance of the Samhain rituals in which they participated, and which aspect(s) of the ritual in particular provided this sense of meaningfulness. The theme of honouring the dead figured prominently among the responses given by celebrants, as many of the men and women who participated in the October 31 rituals speak primarily of this motif as significant. Among them is Mark, a participant in the ritual of the school of Paganism, but not one of the organizers; Mark describes himself as Jewish first, but as possessing a Judeo-Pagan philosophy. In speaking of the Samhain ritual, he comments,

It was meaningful in terms of respecting ancestors and deceased friends, honouring what their lives meant to me. Completing the circle was important, because the circle also means life. (A-3, 20/11/2003)

Also in this category is Steve, likewise a celebrant in the ritual of the school of Paganism, as well as one of its teachers; Steve describes his religious pathway as eclectic, including Norse, Celtic, and shamanistic elements. Like Mark, Steve and Karen similarly identify the honouring of deceased ancestors as especially powerful (emphasizing the rite which involved the use of apples), Karen actually stating that the ritual aided her in dealing with the death of loved ones.

The school ritual that took place was my first Samhain ritual this year, and what sticks out in my mind in particular was the fact that they used the apple tree as a focus for the memorial of the dead. I really liked that. They took the concept of Avalon being the isle of apples, and the apple itself as being an example of the fruit that contains its own seeds, and so it can reproduce, and they took that to a wonderful expression. I found it extremely meaningful. The actual act of hanging the apple with the names of my beloved dead on the tree was something that moved me very much. It always does. I put the teacher aside, and let myself just be that person who desperately misses my grandfather and one of my best friends. It was quite moving in that respect. (A-2, 03/12/2003)

Steve, in speaking of the school's Samhain ritual, remarks,

It was the second of four that I actually ended up going to. I really did like the

atmosphere of it. I felt the atmosphere was very conducive to feeling the ancestors there. It was a very community-oriented ritual. We were remembering our ancestors, we were told to invoke their memory, to bring it forth, and to place it on this tree which is also an icon of life. Trees go through their cycles: they die in the winter, they're reborn in the spring, especially apple trees, because when they come back in the spring, they're all flowers and beautiful. It's very invigorating. They bear fruit that we can eat; it's kind of like rejuvenation. Samhain is all about remembering the people that have gotten us to this point; that's basically our family and our ancestors, and not just ours – everybody's. We have to make sure the community's ancestors are respected. (A-4, 30/11/2003)

Paula, already mentioned in this work and a celebrant at the university society's ritual, similarly cites the element of honouring the dead as providing her with the opportunity to grieve a personal loss.

What was important to me was the part of the ritual where she asked us to name somebody who had died in the past year...and my great aunt had died in September, so for me that was the part that kind of choked me up... so that was meaningful to me because I'm still kind of going through the process of getting over it, so I guess it helped. (B-1, 20/11/2003)

Also in this category is Robert, a celebrant at the Wiccan group's Samhain ritual and a solitary practitioner of Wicca who has not been initiated into a coven of any kind. When speaking of the elements of the Samhain ritual which he deemed meaningful, he first speaks in general terms, citing the mobilization of energy, which he was able to feel during the ritual. He does, however, identify as powerful the exchange of ideas which occurred when individuals talked in turn of a deceased loved one as the talking stick was circulated. Of this, he remarks,

I listened to the confessions, if you will, of the other people, and I had tears in my eyes a few times. It was touching. That's what was the most meaningful for me, and what I'll remember the most. (C-2, 08/01/2004)

Other individuals indicated that two primary concepts treated in the Samhain ritual, the honouring of the dead and the banishing of negativity, both performed important functions for them. Charlotte, owner of the school of Paganism, indicates that

both concepts dealt with in the ritual were significant to her; she does, however, speak more of the meaningfulness of the honouring of the dead than she does of the elimination of negative aspects of the outgoing year. Charlotte had recently lost someone close to her, and felt it important to have the opportunity to show reverence to the departed loved one, remarking,

Yes, it was definitely very meaningful to me. This is the first year that I've had somebody close to me who has passed away, so it gives me an opportunity to connect through my spiritual practice with him, and deal with this particular situation. My grandfather died in July. They had the apple tree, and you wrote down the name of a person who had passed on on the apple, and put it on the tree as an offering, so I got to recognize him by putting down his name. Addressing that clears up he is quite gone. (A-1, 13/11/2003)

Moving to the topic of ridding oneself of negative aspects of the year which was ending, Charlotte continues that

I liked their idea also of filling a candle with something you wanted to have closure with. That was likewise important. (A-1, 13/11/2003)

Also citing both the honouring of the dead and the banishing of negativity as equally important are Julia and Christine, two (of the four) students who led the ritual at the school of Paganism. Julia is a solitary practitioner of Wicca who follows no particular pathway within the tradition, and Christine describes herself as a practitioner of Wicca, but with no formal initiation into a group. Like Charlotte, these two women speak of the importance of both primary elements of the Samhain ritual which they created. The equal focus they place on the two is perhaps not surprising; given that they were involved in the creation of the ritual, it stands to reason that they would include elements which they hold to be equally significant. In speaking of the ritual, Julia observes,

Since it was the first time that we led a ritual, it was a bit overwhelming. I didn't

feel the energy as well as the other times. I was too distracted, too worried about the next step; what's going to go on next? In some ways, I didn't get to enjoy the ritual as much as by being a participant. It was meaningful in the sense that we took the two important points, honouring the dead and banishing negativity for the past year before we start to celebrate the new year; I think they were two key, important points. I think we were successful in interpreting them and acting upon them, so that gave it some meaning. (A-5, 09/11/2003)

Like Julia, Christine indicates that being on edge was a factor in her overall impression of the ritual, pointing out, "I definitely felt nervous during the ritual, so I really didn't get everything I should have got out of it." (A-6, 10/11/2003) Despite this, in her retrospective on the Samhain ritual, in responding to whether or not it was a meaningful experience, she answers,

Yes, it was. First of all, we wrote it up. I think we covered what Samhain is all about, those two things: negativity and the new year, and remembering the dead, because we never take time out to remember. (A-6, 10/11/2003)

One individual identifies the Samhain ritual's significance primarily in the fact that it helped her mark the end of the old year and put things to rest. At the time of the Samhain ritual, Annette was a solitary, self-initiated practitioner of Celtic Wicca, and both a teacher and student at the school of Paganism. While the honouring of ancestors was certainly important to Annette, she speaks first and foremost of the putting to rest of certain aspects of the previous year. She initially comments that the ritual was significant in that it was led by people she knew and had studied with, then adds,

The other reason why it was meaningful for me is because of what Samhain actually means. Samhain means putting things to an end and starting anew. I had done a lot of preparation before Samhain, meditating and seeing how my life was during the past year, and what I want to change for the new year, so coming to terms with certain aspects of my life, and then celebrating the end of that particular aspect of my life, and then renewing with the new. (A-7, 27/11/2003)

Annette then adds,

It was a general pleasant feeling, and the aspect of remembering the ancestors and

putting the names on the tree, and remembering those people who have passed away, either recently or some time ago, just taking the time to remember them, and cherish them, and cherish their memory, and not being sad about it, that was interesting. (A-7, 27/11/2003)

A certain number of individuals speak in general terms when discussing the elements of the Samhain ritual which provided meaning for them. Sophie, who partook of the university society's ritual, states clearly that she is not Wiccan, but incorporates several elements of Wicca into her practice. In describing her pathway, she likens Paganism to a grocery store, and says that she picks what she needs at any given time; she is particularly interested in the Sumerian and Egyptian pantheons of deities. When addressing the most meaningful element of the Samhain ritual, she focuses on a general feeling obtained, and no one particular aspect. Sophie states, "It was quite nice. I think it was more the general event (that had meaning)." (B-2, 18/11/2003)

Ross, who participated in the university group's ritual, characterizes himself as without a distinct spiritual pathway, but remarks that he feels closest to the Hellenic reconstructionist movement. Like Sophie, albeit in a different way, Ross speaks not of any one element of the ritual itself when speaking of its significance, but more of an overall impression. Of the ritual proper, he stated, "It wasn't completely unmeaningful for me. The raising of power, I felt." (B-3, 20/11/2003) It was, however, the very matter of coming together with other Neo-Pagans and celebrating the plurality of the tradition which was of the greatest significance. Indeed, Ross indicates that philosophical differences among participants were not a detriment to the ritual's effectiveness, but were, in fact, one of its strong points, declaring,

It demonstrates a certain amount of maturity within the community and the religion that we're able to tolerate individual thought, and I was happy with it. I think that

it was one of the shining moments within the ritual. It demonstrated one of our strongest aspects. The ritual demonstrates the plurality of Neo-Paganism, and how these people who have different paths can come together and worship the gods or ideas of gods. (B-3, 20/11/2003)

Nancy, who follows a Gardnerian Wiccan path, was the lead organizer of the Samhain ritual held by the university group. When speaking of the most significant aspect of the ritual, Nancy too speaks in overall terms, citing that she found meaning in the fact that the ritual succeeded in communicating powerful ideas to participants. This probably stems from the fact that it was a teaching ritual, and she was the group leader. Nancy remarks,

I think it was (meaningful). People came up afterwards, and said they enjoyed it, and that there was a good feeling. When I'm performing a ritual, it's more important for me that the people around get something out of it than I do. When I'm doing something public, I'm doing it for them, not for me. That's part of the teaching aspect of it. That for me made it meaningful. (B-4, 18/11/2003)

In reflecting upon the Samhain ritual, Andrew, already mentioned in this work and leader of the Wiccan organization, refers to the overall value of the experience as well, citing no one particular aspect which stood out as significant. Andrew indicates that the overall energy of the event, as well as the fact that it drew a higher-than-expected number of participants, was of importance to him. (C-1, 17/03/2004)

Rachel too talks in general terms of the meaningfulness of the Samhain ritual. Co-organizer of the Wiccan group's marking of Samhain, she describes her spiritual beliefs as eclectic. She has a particular affinity with the Egyptian pantheon of gods; however, she has a private interest in the Kabbalah, is interested in the teachings of an Indian spiritual master, and frequently partakes of public Wiccan rituals. The positive elements she identifies in the ritual were not specific to it being a Samhain ritual, but are elements deemed desirable in Neo-Pagan rituals of all natures.

It was the grounding part at the beginning, when the circle was made, and good vibes and attitudes to keep the energy positive. I guess that's what was really important to me during that ritual. (C-3, 02/12/2003)

In concluding this chapter, we must recapitulate some of its most salient points. We have observed that Samhain appears to be a significant festival to most, but not all, Neo-Pagans, and that when men and women speak of its importance, they cite common themes and ideas: the honouring of the dead, the banishing of negativity, reflection on the outgoing year, and, to a lesser extent, divination into the year to come. We have also seen that when Samhain rituals are performed by different groups, these rituals sometimes express the themes in similar ways; we have noted, however, that these expressions are not always identical, a number of variations and differences in emphasis and focus being present. Consideration of these differences tells us a great deal not only about the varying perspectives of these groups on Samhain, but also speaks of the varied nature of these groups in more general terms. As an important final note, it has also become clear in this chapter that a given event can inspire a variety of religious responses. As we prepare to turn our attention to the second Neo-Pagan festival treated in this work, Beltane, we will bear in mind these insights we have gained into Neo-Pagan practice in our consideration of Samhain. As we explore this second holiday celebrated by modern-day Pagans, we will aim to refine the emerging image we are now beginning to form of what men and women do in Neo-Pagan rituals, and the ways in which the ritual experience is meaningful to them.

CHAPTER 4

THE FESTIVAL OF BELTANE

In this chapter, we will turn our attention to the festival of Beltane, celebrated each May 1 by most contemporary Pagans. In conducting field research into the Beltane festival, data was gathered from three celebrations carried out by three different groups in the greater Montreal area. In a loose sense, the three groups were related to those which had been observed for the Samhain festival. A number of the celebrations marking the Beltane festival were private affairs, and were thus inaccessible to outsiders. As a consequence, two of these celebrations were observed by the author of the present study, and interviews were carried out with organizers and other participants. As regards the third group, data was collected from interviews alone, given the aforementioned ban on outsiders attending the ritual.

The first group whose ritual was observed was the university-based Pagan society. The organization's leaders offered a non-credit course open to students (and alumni) from the university; four of these students were given the task of organizing the Beltane ritual as part of their course requirements. Approximately thirteen men and women attended the ritual, four of whom were interviewed for this work. One of the interviewees was a teacher of the course, another was a participant in the celebrations, while the two remaining interviewees were among the four students who organized the ritual. All those interviewed are female.

The second organization whose ritual was observed was the province-wide Wiccan organization. Theirs was a public ritual, co-organized by the founder of the

group and a partner. Fourteen participants, both group members and outsiders, partook of the celebration. The co-organizers, one man and one woman, were interviewed in this study, as well as another female in attendance.

The ritual of a third group, a closed coven, was not observed, as it was a private affair; however, a detailed account of the all stages of the ritual was provided by the chief organizer of the event, ensuring that a very clear picture of the proceedings was obtained. The group in question is loosely affiliated with the school of Paganism, as the owner of the school was chief organizer and high priestess. Along with the high priestess and her partner, the high priest, there were three dedicants in the group, individuals who had recently come to this particular Wiccan tradition and were following it for a year and a day to determine if they wished to continue. There were thus five participants in the ritual; due to privacy issues and busy schedules, three of the five declined an interview. As a result, only the high priestess and one other female celebrant partook of this study.

In order to obtain the most complete picture possible of Neo-Pagan markings of Beltane, particular steps had to be taken regarding the matter of being denied access to a number of privately-held Beltane rituals. For methodological purposes, it was deemed desirable to interview a number of other Neo-Pagans who had not participated in the above rituals in their marking of the festival. Three of these individuals, men and women who marked the day not by partaking of a group ritual but in another manner, will be considered in the current work. All three had previously been interviewed at the time of the Samhain festival. Two of them were affiliated with the university society, and marked the May 1 festival by attending a Neo-Pagan wedding; one was associated with the school of Paganism, and celebrated Beltane through holding a surprise birthday party.

The testimonials of these three individuals will be considered alongside the others when treating the matter of present-day Pagans' perspectives on the festival of Beltane.

The structure of this chapter will parallel that of the chapter on the Samhain festival. In our consideration of Beltane, we will first examine the perspectives of modern-day Pagans on the festival; this will provide us with an idea of what celebrants might have been looking for in the festivals in which they were to participate. The information in this section of the work will come from interviews conducted with Neo-Pagans. Second, as was the case with the October 31 festival, a phenomenological account will be provided of a combined, "synthetic" ritual drawing upon common elements of the three markings of Beltane considered in the current study; this data will come from observations and interviews with celebrants. With the aim of obtaining a clear understanding of the unique nature of each of the groups, an analysis of the manner in which each of the three explored the common elements as described in the account of the synthetic ritual will be effected; similarly, the matter of the ways in which each of the groups included elements not appearing in the combined ritual will also be considered. In the third part of this chapter, a functional analysis will be made, as we will look at the importance and function of the Beltane rituals for the men and women who partook of them; this will provide us with insights into the ways in which the events examined provided these individuals with a sense of meaning. This information, once again, will come from the interviews with celebrants of the rituals. Having given a full account of the Beltane ritual in this chapter, as well as the one marking Samhain in the previous one, we will conclude chapter four by using what we have observed to further fine tune our

picture of the meaningfulness of seasonal rituals in a general sense for Neo-Pagans, making a number of preliminary observations.

When interviewed regarding the significance of Beltane, Neo-Pagans voiced a number of common themes related to the festival. One such prominent theme was the concept the union of the god and goddess leading to fertility in nature. Charlotte, high priestess of the private coven, remarks,

We think of Samhain as the beginning of winter; Beltane is the opposite. Beltane is the beginning of summer. It's associated with fertility; it's also associated with divine union, divine union meaning, you take your concept of god and goddess, and it's through their union that we get the fertility within our world, be it our crops, our trees, our animals, personal/physical fertility, as well as inspirational fertility. We like to remind each other that we are alive, one way or another. A lot of people will celebrate that physically, that recognition that we are alive. They will show that by engaging sexually in what's called the great rite. (C-1, 14/05/2004)¹

This focus on the Beltane festival as being a time of fertility in nature and a return of the bounty of the land is a feeling echoed by Annette, a member of the private coven.

Annette comments,

Beltane is important to me because it's the beginning of summer. It's the beginning of when life is coming back. The light part of the year is coming back. It's the time of the year when I feel the most alive. (C-2, 12/06/2004)

Nancy, we remember, was the lead organizer of the Samhain ritual held by the university-based group; she is also one of the teachers of the course at the university.

Nancy also speaks of the renewed bounty of the land when addressing the matter of the importance of the Beltane festival, remarking,

It's a time of renewal. Imbolc (celebrated by most Neo-Pagans on February 2) is supposed to be the first of the spring festivals, but does February look like spring to you? For me, spring starts in May, so Beltane is new beginnings. It's rebirth. (A-1, 16/05/2004)

Karen, mentioned earlier regarding her participation in the Samhain ritual, partook of a non-traditional marking of Beltane, as we will see later in this chapter.

Karen appears to attach the same significance to Beltane.

Beltane, for me, represents the beginning of the summer season. Much the same way as Samhain indicates the beginning of the introspective time of year, Beltane represents the more active, outgoing aspect. It really is the beginning of summer for me. Usually, by the beginning of May, there are baby leaves out, the ground is starting to green up, spring flowers, hyacinths, are available in supermarkets for a while. By the beginning of May, I'm really beginning to see that the earth is awake again. You're starting to see the male and female aspects of nature starting to interact with each other on a fertile level. You're moving from an introspective to an interactive, and I think that's reflected in the mythologies of the world as well. You see thematically in mythologies, god and goddess, one or the other representing the earth, and one or the other representing the spirit, the people, interacting with each other and showing that reliance and interaction between the two is essential. (D-1, 12/06/2004)

Stephanie, co-organizer of the ritual held by the province-wide Wiccan organization, describes herself as Wiccan, but not a follower of any particular pathway. In outlining the significance of Beltane, Stephanie also focuses on the union of the god and goddess, commenting that it is from this merging that all life springs. Without this, she observes, there would be no life. Beltane, Stephanie points out, is a celebration of life. (B-2, 16/06/2004)

Norman, who identifies himself as a Gardnerian Wiccan, is affiliated with the university-based group, but chose to attend a non-traditional marking of the May 1 festival (as we will see later in this chapter) instead of the group ritual. When speaking of Beltane, Norman also cites it as a time of the regeneration of nature, saying,

Beltane is important because it's one of the four fire festivals of the year, and it's the first one of the spring; it's actually the start of summer. This is the time when you start preparing the soil, and selecting what kind of plants you want, and you can start putting them in. The plants you put in in the fall, the bulbs, are already up. It's the activation of the life force expressed by the plants coming up, and everything turning green. (D-2, 16/05/2004)

Many Neo-Pagans point out that it is not only the fertility of nature which is celebrated at Beltane, but fertility of the mind –creativity and inspiration – that is focused on as well. Charlotte offers commentary on this.

I don't see fertility as a limiting word. I don't think it has to be strictly in association to baby-making. Where do the poets get their ideas? Where does every great invention come from? Some sort of divine spark, and when you get that union of god and goddess, you get this divine spark, which can lead to all kinds of things. We all talk of things like spring fever. That's all part of it. Everyone comes alive, comes awake, and wants go get out and do things, create things. It's that desire to create that comes from this kind of energy. In our coven, personally, we don't apply skylad practice or sexual activity within the coven. We focus more on the inspiration... the symbolic divine union and inspiration idea. (C-1, 14/05/2004)

Annette similarly makes mention of the importance of Beltane as a time of fertility in not only the literal sense, but in a general sense as well.

It's the time of the year when everything is possible. It's the time of the year I can start working on the projects I want to work on, and I have the most energy and strength to do whatever project I feel like doing that particular year. (C-2, 12/06/2004)

Nancy also touches upon the issue of Beltane being a time to implement ideas and plans which had their first incarnations in winter.

It's a time to sit back and look at what's happened over the winter and see where you're going for the next year. See what you've started, what you can continue with, and where you can go with it in the summer, because nobody wants to do anything in winter; it's just too darn cold. But you can build ideas, and Beltane is the time you can start implementing them. (A-1, 16/05/2004)

Karen similarly speaks of Beltane as a time of fertility in the figurative sense, as a time of creativity and putting plans into practice.

May also is the time we start seeing, in pop culture, the first important films of summer start coming out. We start seeing high school graduations and convocation ceremonies in colleges and high schools. We see people start taking the first steps into new parts of their lives. May is the beginning of one of the biggest wedding seasons. I find that when I look around, there are so many

people who are happy. May is the first really happy month that I observe, and to me, that also is Beltane. (D-1, 12/06/2004)

Along the same lines, Norman makes reference to Beltane as a time of creativity and beginning of new projects.

It represents new beginnings. This is the time when all the planning you have done is now to be acted on. Once the sun starts to appear, you feel much better, you feel more active. (D-2, 16/05/2004)

Another theme attached by some contemporary Pagans to Beltane is the coming together of individuals in communion after a long winter's separation. In the words of Charlotte,

Everybody seems to hibernate in the winter, so this is a movement towards freedom and reconnection with others. We use the word "union," and it's union and communion. "Communion" comes from the word "union," because you've got your community, your people that are going to come together, and that's essentially what communion is. They come together for a single purpose; that's your "union" idea. The god and goddess come together for a single purpose, and that's to bring life and creativity to the world. (C-1, 14/05/2004)

Although she does not focus directly on the idea of it being a time of union with other people, Annette echoes the idea that Beltane marks the point of the year when individuals are able to leave their homes after a long winter's hibernation, saying,

It's the time ...when I go do my garden outside, when I am more connected to nature, I see my plants and flowers grow, I can start growing things in my garden and working outside, being outside more, getting more fresh air. I really like that time of the year. It's the best time for me. (C-2, 12/06/2004)

Karen also makes mention of the social aspect of Beltane, it being a time that individuals come together after a long winter's isolation.

You really see that reflected in the attitudes and approaches of people as well. There's a definite psychological and emotional reflection of that in the human part of the world as well. Everybody's brighter, everybody's a little more awake and happier. There seems to be that huge sigh of relief that winter's finally over, and we have gotten a little tired of being introspective. It's time to just go out and walk outside and appreciate the air and the sun again. I find it's usually around

that time of year that people really start spending more time outside. If they have a garden, they're working in it. This is where they start fixing up the house again. Everybody starts interacting. They turn the attention outwards again, as opposed to an inward focus...the human psyche and the social aspect, when they interact with each other. (D-1, 12/06/2004)

We will now turn our focus to an account of a single, synthetic Beltane ritual which draws from the three markings of the festival observed in the current research; this single account will serve as the point of reference for all observations and insights which are to appear later in this chapter.

In discussing the preparations necessary for the Beltane ritual, much as we saw in our consideration of Samhain, organizers cited a number of concrete issues which had to be handled in order to ensure the smooth running of the proceedings. These included matters such as the choice of themes to be explored, the tools and materials to be used during the rites, and what kind of food and drink might be needed. The division of the labour required to effectively carry out the ritual was also a question which was broached. The matter of the precise time and place in which the Beltane ritual was to be held was similarly discussed, as was the all-important topic of precisely who was to perform which particular roles during the proceedings.

In the opening stage of the actual ritual, organizers purified the space in which the rites of Beltane were to be held. A broom was used to sweep away physical dirt, eliminating all negative energy and entities in the process; salt and water were used to clean the space as well, as ritual leaders circled three times, saying,

We cleanse this space in the name of the god and goddess.
So mote it be!

Also in the opening of the ritual proper, the required steps in readying participants for the ritual were taken. In particular, a "briefing" session of sorts took place in which

celebrants were informed as to precisely what was expected of them during the ritual. The magic circle in which the ritual was to take place was then cast by one of the organizers; the lines she recited while doing so included a reference to a “world out of worlds, and time out of time.”

The opening portion of the ritual continued as the quarters, or elemental spirits, of the four cardinal points were summoned for their presence, guidance, and assistance during the ritual. This began with an appeal to the watchtowers of the north, corresponding to earth; following this was the summoning of those of the east, representing air; the elementals of the south were next called, corresponding to fire; finally, the elemental spirits of the west, representing water, were summoned.

The god and goddess were then invoked, as their presence was requested at the ritual; a generic reference to “lord and lady” was made in the invocation. Two candles were lit on the altar, one representing the god, the other the goddess.

With this, the opening phase of the Beltane ritual was completed, and the core element was undertaken. A “statement of purpose” of sorts was read aloud by ritual organizers, conveying the most salient themes regarding Beltane; this was done in order to ensure that all celebrants were “on the same page” as the ritual proceeded. Most prominently, in the statement of purpose, celebrants were reminded what in particular celebrants were honouring in their rites: Beltane as a celebration of fertility. Participants were asked to recall that fertility refers not only to literal, physical fecundity, but to figurative fertility as well, a “fertility of the mind;” this includes concepts such as inspiration, creativity, and new ideas.

Ritual organizers continued by performing the “centerpiece” of the ritual: a union of the goddess and the god. This symbolic union, enacted in most Neo-Pagan rituals, is particularly important at Beltane, given the emphasis on fecundity. A loaf of bread was held up by a female participant as a male celebrant acknowledged its making, from the ground to the seed, from seed to the grain, and from grain to the bread; he then called upon the god (or lord) to bless the bread. The man then held up the wine in a chalice (a symbol of the feminine principle) as the woman recognized its making, from ground to vine, from vine to grape, and from grape to wine; she then appealed to the goddess (or lady) to bless the wine. The stick which had been used to cast the circle was used to symbolize the union of the lord and the lady, as the woman held aloft the chalice while the man thrust the stick into it. Each partook of the bread and wine, subsequently sharing them with all celebrants.

The closing stage of the ritual was undertaken as the god and goddess were thanked for their presence at the ritual. The elemental spirits were similarly recognized for their participation in the proceedings; one by one, the elements of water (west), fire (south), air (east), and earth (north) were acknowledged by the organizers. This having been done, the circle was decast as one organizer walked in a counter-clockwise fashion, stating

The circle is open
But never broken!

The Beltane ritual completed, celebrants proceeded to partake of a communal meal (or “feast”). As individuals ate, drank, and talked, old friendships were renewed and new friendships were formed.

Having given an account of the May 1 ritual, drawing upon the three rituals observed in this study, we will now turn our attention to an analysis of any significant variations in the way that each of the three groups carried out its ritual, along with any important additional aspects each group may have included in its marking of Beltane. In beginning this exercise, we will examine the preparatory phase of the ritual; two issues from this stage merit closer investigation, as there were significant differences in the ways they were carried out: the matter of choosing the themes to be explored, and the allotting of roles. As regards selecting the particular ways in which the themes of the festival were to be explored in the ritual, we note that the organizers of the event held by the university society settled upon particular motifs during a brainstorming session of sorts, as they consulted books, their teachers, and each other. The Beltane themes chosen by the private coven were selected by the high priestess of that group. It was the high priest and founder of the Wiccan organization who selected the manner of ritually expressing the significance of Beltane in his group, with help from the high priestess; this was also done through the consulting of textual sources.

The different means used by each group of deciding upon the themes to be dealt with for the Beltane festival can most likely be accounted for by considering the nature of each of the groups. The students in the class given by the university-based society were asked to lead a ritual in order to fulfill class requirements; significantly, the class adhered to no particular Neo-Pagan pathway. Instead, part of the course involved students exploring a number of pathways and drawing from them as they saw fit. This is, in a sense, the polar opposite of the way the matter was handled in the private coven. In that group, dedicants were being instructed in the ways of one distinct Neo-Pagan pathway,

that of the Black Forest Clan, by the high priest and high priestess, both very well-versed in the ways of the Clan. That considered, it is not surprising that the themes of the ritual were chosen by those who knew the tradition best. The high priest of the Wiccan organization was also the founder of the group, and its most active participant. It therefore comes as no surprise that he took it upon himself to choose the themes of the ritual, given his prominent position in the organization.

The way in which roles were allotted for the ritual was also handled in different manners. In the case of both the university society and the private coven, the teachers assigned these roles, while in the Wiccan organization, roles were filled on a voluntary basis. (It bears mention that in all three groups, certain roles were assumed by the teachers / founder of the organizations; this will not figure into our treatment of the issue.)

Again, this variation among groups is likely rooted in the different character of each. The organizers of the ritual held by the university group were taking a class and, as such, were under the tutelage and guidance of their instructors. It is therefore understandable that these teachers should facilitate the process by directing such matters as which student was to perform which function. This is even truer of the private coven; given that dedicants in that group were being trained in the ways of a particular pathway, the teachers played an active role in guiding dedicants through the process. That the roles of quarter callers were filled on a voluntary basis by the Wiccan organization is similarly logical; since the group was a new one, there was likely not an available bank of members who could be called upon to fill these positions. It was, in all probability, decided to do this based on presence at the ritual.

In reflecting upon the opening stage of the ritual, the manner in which each group prepared celebrants for the rites to come differed in some important ways. In the case of both the university-based group and the Wiccan organization, celebrants were greeted by organizers and given basic instructions prior to the ritual. Leaders of the private coven, however, did not meet with dedicants immediately before the ritual and give them instructions.

In all probability, this is because the rituals held by both the university society and the Wiccan organization were public affairs. As such, they likely expected that a number of novices might be in attendance, and would require an introduction to what was to come. Leaders of the private coven knew that their dedicants were already well-versed in the ways of Neo-Pagan ritual, and did not require this detailed introduction. Moreover, all of the participants knew each other. Although the high priest and high priestess of that group had indeed earlier informed dedicants of the role each was to perform in the ritual, and the high priestess did indeed include a “statement of purpose” during the ritual itself, this is quite different from the “greeting and instruction” approach taken by the other groups.

In examining the core aspects of the Beltane rituals under study, we observe that despite the common focus on fertility (as symbolized by the union of god and goddess), there was some variation in the way this theme was expressed by the three groups. We note that the Beltane ritual of the university-based society included not only a “statement of purpose” for their ritual and an enactment of the union of the god and goddess, but also a seed-planting rite. Celebrants were asked, in turn, to plant seeds in a pot circulated in a clockwise direction by one of the organizers. (Group leaders mentioned when

interviewed that this act was symbolic of not only fertility in the biological sense, but also of the birth of new ideas, projects, and concepts which were set to grow.) All the while, a chant entitled “Round and Round,” provided by one of the organizers, was sung:

Round, round, round we go
Weave a weaving, watch it grow.
Bring us joy today;
Dance the lusty dance of May.

Round and round and round we go,
Make our love grow.
Bring us freedom on this day
To follow our hearts’ way.

The organizer holding the pot again went around the circle, this time in a counter-clockwise manner. This was done, as explained by one organizer when interviewed, to ground the energy which had been created for the seed planting ceremony. As this was done, “May’s Refrain,” a song contributed by one of the organizers, one dating back to May singing from her childhood, was sung by celebrants:

I am May bright and gay,
Listen to my happy hymn
I will sing songs of spring;
Happy news I bring

There are flowers fresh on boughs,
Where I spend my sunny hours.
Come with me full of glee
To the Greenwood tree.

We remark that that the Wiccan organization’s ritual included the reading of a didactic text concerning the meaning of Beltane, and an enactment of the union of the god and goddess which was particularly sexual; the high priest and high priestess, embodying the god and goddess, used a metal athame, representing the male principle, and a chalice, symbolic of the female, to simulate this union. The athame was inserted

into the chalice, and a drop of juice from the cup was allowed to drop onto the tongue of the high priestess; the sexual symbolism of this rite requires no explanation.

Along with this, we recall that the Wiccan group's Beltane ritual also included the formal making of a wish for prosperity by celebrants.

We similarly note that the core of the private coven's ritual, the union of the god and goddess, was carried out in a particularly unique manner. The high priestess first delivered a "statement of purpose" in which she spoke of some of the significant aspects of Beltane. A symbolic divine union was then enacted as the god and the goddess, represented by masculine and feminine herbs (green tea and orris root, respectively) were combined and burned in a divinatory need fire, a fire from which inspiration could be gleaned by all in attendance. As the union of the god and goddess was symbolically taking place, participants took in the energy of that union. Celebrants scried in the fire, meaning that they gazed into the flames and allowed themselves to absorb whatever messages it might give them. The objective of this, said the high priestess when interviewed, was to give all in attendance the opportunity to meet the divine on their own terms. This could take the form of a scent which was smelled, a sound that was heard, or a vision that was seen. This scrying took place for approximately fifteen minutes. Celebrants then wrote in their respective Books of Shadows (journals kept by witches) what they had seen, heard, and sensed during the scrying process. The inspiration gleaned from the fire, having been duly noted, was then shared among participants.

In reflecting upon the variety noted among the core of the three Beltane rituals, several observations can be made, each speaking of the difference in personality of the three groups. That the university society's ritual began with an explanation of the general

truths about Beltane may lie in the fact that organizers of the ritual were students in an “Introduction to Paganism” class, and as such, wished to hold a clear, straightforward ritual which explored only basic ideas of the festival. It could also speak of the fact that this was a public ritual, open to all, and leaders wished to ensure that their ritual would be meaningful for participants of all skill levels. The matter of asking participants to physically plant seeds in a pot might demonstrate a stronger focus on literal, not figurative, fertility. (When interviewed, however, organizers did indeed speak of this act as symbolizing fertility of the mind, or inspiration, as well, citing the creation and growth of new projects and ideas.)

That the ritual of the Wiccan organization also included the reading of a text outlining the significance of Beltane perhaps stems from the fact that this ritual as well was a public one, and, as such, was thorough but basic. In all likelihood, organizers wished to create a complete but straightforward treatment of the Beltane festival, one which might resonate with potential members with little experience. As was the case with the ritual of the university society, both fertility of both a figurative and literal nature were symbolized by this group in their proceedings. Figurative fertility, inspiration, was expressed through the making of wishes for prosperity. Somewhat greater emphasis, however, appeared to be placed on physical fertility, as the rite marking the union of the god and goddess was a highly sexual one. This, in all probability, reflects a personal choice on the part of lead organizers.

The private coven ritual also began with a “statement of purpose,” somewhat similar to the general explanations of Beltane delivered by the other two groups. The speech delivered by the high priestess, however, was more specific and delved into more

specialized topics than did the other two. This can likely be explained by the fact that the coven ritual was a closed one; those in attendance were experienced practitioners of Neo-Paganism, meaning that specialized, advanced themes would be fully comprehended by all. Although the ritual of the private coven dealt with both literal and figurative fertility, greater emphasis was undoubtedly placed on non-literal side. The very of the union of the god and goddess was enacted in a manner which was not overtly sexual, symbolized by the mixing of herbs in a cauldron. Fertility as inspiration was irrefutably the expression of the Beltane theme, as witnessed by celebrants' gazing into a fire in order to gain insight. This focus on inspiration perhaps speaks of an emphasis the private coven places on personal growth and development.

As regards the manner in which each of the May 1 rituals was closed, the minor variations are trivial to the point of not meriting exploration, particularly when bearing in mind the scope of the present study.

Although the post-ritual ceremonies of the three groups show a great degree of uniformity, one minor difference bears mention: the primary subject of conversation which accompanied the feast of each group. The main topic of discussion among participants at the university-based celebration was the future course of study which was to be taken by the students in the Paganism class. This is indicative of the fact that the organizers of the ritual were indeed students who were concerned with their future studies. The primary subject of conversation during the feast of the closed coven also appears to have centred around books and pedagogical matters. This once again indicates that a number of the participants in the ritual were students (or dedicants) learning more about this specific Neo-Pagan pathway, and, as such, were concerned with their course of

study. Finally, the most prominent topic discussed during the post-ritual feast of the Wiccan group was membership in the organization. This speaks of the fact that the group was new at the time and seeking members.

As mentioned earlier, not all Neo-Pagans marked the Beltane festival through actual participation in a formal ritual, but did so in other manners. Two such events will now be considered, again using the “synthetic” Beltane ritual as a point of reference. Rather than mark Beltane by attending a formal ritual, Sophie and her husband Norman attended a Neo-Pagan wedding instead. The wedding ceremony was intentionally held at Beltane; time constraints were such that it was impossible for Sophie and Norman to attend both the wedding and a formal Beltane ritual as well. Feeling the wedding an appropriate way to capture the spirit of Beltane, the couple opted to attend the marriage ceremony. Although the civil aspect of the union took place at the courthouse, the religious side took place on a farm in a rural setting outside the Montreal area, presided over by a Neo-Pagan clergyman. Attending the festivities were friends and family, and a pleasant day was had by all.

Karen likewise celebrated Beltane in a somewhat unconventional manner. Along with her work at the school, she is also high priestess of a private coven, and her husband acts as high priest. Other coven members are, in fact, students who are learning the ways of this particular pathway from Karen and her husband. The couple decided to inform students at one of their meetings that an impromptu, non-traditional Beltane ritual was to be held, and that the students were to lead it despite the obvious absence of any sort of preparation. It is significant that the meeting was held on the birthday of one of the group members, and a birthday theme was chosen by the high priestess. As the ritual was

begun, the altar devotion, casting of the circle, and calling of the quarters were done by the students, and the invocation of the god and goddess was performed by the high priest and high priestess, respectively. The core of the ritual consisted of presenting a cake to the coven member celebrating his birthday, baked by the high priestess and high priest specifically for the occasion. "Happy Birthday" was duly sung by all coven members, and the candles on the cake were blown out. Significantly, a spirit of levity was the backdrop to the proceedings. The blessings of the deities were called down upon the pie which was to be eaten. The ritual was then closed as sacred space was brought down; the god and goddess were thanked for their attendance, the quarters were dismissed, and the circle was dissolved; following this, a feast (consisting of the pie) was held.

The very fact that Sophie and Norman viewed attending a Neo-Pagan wedding as a most suitable means of celebrating the Beltane festival, and that Karen felt the birthday party to be as appropriate as a formal ritual (such as the synthetic model outlined above), is indicative of the great variety in practice shown by contemporary Pagans. Their interpretation of the matter demonstrates the flexibility with which many of these men and women worship, speaking also of the remarkable openness and creativity with which many Neo-Pagans practice their faith.

In turning our attention to the function of ritual, we will now examine the varying ways in which the Beltane rituals observed in this study were significant experiences to the men and women who participated in them; in doing this, we will continue to fine tune our picture of the manners in which the ritual experience in more general terms is important to participants. Perhaps the most commonly cited theme to emerge in this section of the work was the importance of rites celebrating the union of the goddess and

the god. In broaching the matter, Andrew, organizer of the Wiccan group's celebration of Beltane, speaks at first in general terms, describing the entire ritual as a meaningful experience; he makes a point of stating that it created a more powerful feeling than did the Samhain ritual which he had also led. When elaborating on the issue, however, he specifies the symbolism of the union of the god and goddess as particularly powerful.

(B-1, 02/05/2004)

Stephanie, co-organizer of the Wiccan ritual, unhesitatingly specifies the union of the male and female deities as the most significant aspect of the ritual for her, saying that it encapsulates the essence of Beltane. The actual rite of the union of the two divine forces, she says, enacted with the chalice and the athame representing the female and male principles, was tantamount to making love with the use of objects. The creation of life symbolized by the entire rite held great meaning for her. (B-2, 16/06/2004)

Charlotte likewise identifies the union of the god and goddess in the private coven's ritual as particularly meaningful, but in a slightly different manner. The high priestess of the private coven locates the meaningfulness in the fact that it marked the first time she combined herbs to represent god and goddess; the experience was a profound one, producing great energy and a powerful feeling.

I've worked with a need fire before, but never in this aspect, so it was unique. Usually, I've combined herbs for divinatory purposes, or for magical, spiritual, energetic, spellcrafting purposes, never specifically to represent god and goddess, so it was a new experience in that aspect, and it was a wonderful feeling charging those two herbs, combining them and feeling that energy come together, especially once the flame was lit. (C-1, 14/05/2004)

Significantly, as ritual leader and high priestess, Charlotte cites a second aspect of the proceedings as important: she found satisfaction in the fact that all celebrants came

away from the ritual having profited from the experience, encountering the divine and gaining insights.

They all got something out of it. They actually did connect. One of them did fire scrying once before, but the others had never done anything more than gaze into a flame, and get something out of it, so it was interesting to note that they could connect with the divine in this way. (C-1, 14/05/2004)

Charlotte points out that this focus on the ritual being a meaningful, safe experience for the dedicants was such that she did not obtain a tremendous amount of meaning from the scrying in and of itself.

As leading the ritual, you are not necessarily a participant of it, so I definitely did not get the kind of experience that everybody else did. I wanted to make sure that their personal encounters of the divine were safe encounters, because sometimes that kind of personal encounter can draw very deep emotions, and if I'm lost in my own vision quest, I'm not going to see that, and I'm not going to be able to be a support, so I couldn't get involved in the ritual as a participant in that aspect. (C-1, 14/05/2004)

When asked if this detracted from the overall value of the experience, Charlotte replies without hesitation that it did not, answering,

No, because it allowed me to see how well they were connecting with the divine, and that being my goal in this ritual, it told me how well the ritual went, whether it was a success or not, if this is something that I would repeat, in a different fashion, using a different type of herbs, or whatnot. (C-1, 14/05/2004)

Another common theme to emerge from interviews concerning the meaningfulness of the ritual experience was the power of the eclecticism, or, phrased differently, the strength in diversity, which was a hallmark of the proceedings. Speaking of this is Marie, a co-organizer of the university society's Beltane ritual. She has followed Nichiren Buddhism for a number of years, and had been delving into contemporary Paganism for approximately two years prior to the ritual in question; Marie states that she finds common ground between the Nichiren Buddhist and Neo-Pagan

traditions. In speaking of the significance of the ritual she co-organized, Marie cites above all that it permitted her to reconcile and express her allegiance to both spiritual pathways. Indeed, the primary source of meaningfulness appears to lie in that she was able to incorporate elements of the two traditions into her celebration of Beltane, this in part through the co-operation of her co-organizers, who agreed to allow her to lead them in a Buddhist chant prior to the ritual. As Marie explains,

In the preparation, I was able to reconcile the Buddhist part with the Pagan part, because I asked the other three while we were doing the preparations (I could not do this at the ritual itself) ... I told them, "If you want, before opening the circle, just chant with me slowly" ... and they did it with me... I already told them what the meaning was in class, and there wasn't any problem there, and they were willing to explore it. I did it slowly with them. That proved to me ... I can prove to any other closed-minded (person) that it's not really an issue, and it's not going to take me away from the fact that I'm primarily Nichiren Buddhist, and I'm exploring this other stuff. I'm doing this from a state of Buddhahood, no matter what I'm doing afterwards. [The co-organizers] were okay with this. That was important to me. I think they got something out of this; they said they felt something from it. They didn't know what...they all felt something positive from doing this. (A-2, 20/05/2004)

Along the same lines, Nancy speaks of the drawing of ideas from eclectic sources and the integration of individual values into the ritual as meaningful. She specifies as particularly powerful that one of the women co-organizing the ritual incorporated an element of her own spirituality, non-Pagan in nature, into the proceedings. She comments,

It was very meaningful. What stood out most for me was one of the songs that were used. There was a chant and there was a song that was used by one of the girls. The song was something she sings in her church. I thought that was nice. It was bringing her own spirituality into what we were doing. I found that was actually very meaningful. It just said something, that she felt comfortable enough to bring the two different sides of her personality together, and to show it to the public. (A-1, 16/05/2004)

Peripherally related to the idea of eclecticism is that of individuals from diverse backgrounds assembling and working together to achieve a particular objective. It is that which Sally, one of the co-organizers of the ritual of the university-based society, cites as meaningful when speaking of the experience. Sally describes herself simply as Wiccan (or “Neo-Pagan”), clarifying that she has not been initiated into any particular group. She points out that the ritual marked the coming together of a variety of people to pool ideas, work together, develop a concept, and watch it grow. Sally elaborates on this, identifying it as a positive experience on an intellectual, a spiritual, and a social level.

The four of us came together. It was very symbolic in itself. We had the whole seed idea...to come up with an idea, to have it conceived and grow, and that’s exactly what happened with the ritual. It started off with nothing, and then we used what we had learned in class, to start the ball rolling, and watch it. It snowballed into the ritual. It was really weird how the ritual itself kind of embodied the same symbolism that we were using with the seed. I learned a lot. It was a huge learning experience for everybody, because we had to research, research, research, and come up with things on our own, and look at structures and think “Okay, this will work, and this probably won’t work,” and just to get together with other individuals, and compromise, and sort things out, and organization, organization, organization. (A-3, 18/05/2004)

Participants in the two non-traditional markings of Beltane located, to a person, the meaningfulness of the events of which they partook in that they constituted a “celebration of the ordinary.” These “alternate ceremonies,” rites rooted in men and women’s day-to-day living, demonstrated that a non-standard celebration of the May 1 festival can nonetheless be a most appropriate manner of marking the day. The Beltane celebration which took the form of a wedding was a meaningful experience to Norman in that the earthly union of a man and woman in marriage reflected the union of the god and goddess on a cosmic level. In speaking of the wedding, Norman comments,

It is totally appropriate...“hieros gamos” is a Greek term. It means “the great rite or marriage.” Typically, in most Pagan religions, if you study the ancient

Sumerians / Babylonians, this is the time that Innana and Thamuz get married, and also Addis and Kedely in Asia Minor, and in Syria, Ishtar and Damus. All over the world, this is a time of fertility. (D-2, 16/05/2004)

Sophie echoes the sentiments of Norman, citing the appropriateness of attending a wedding as a means of celebrating the spirit of Beltane. In describing the event, Sophie offers,

It was very well done by one of our friends. As far as I know, it was a ritual. It was the same as having gone to a Beltane ritual. I was with friends, it was lovely, everybody had a good time... everybody felt it was lovely. It was a beautiful day. It couldn't have been more perfect. It represents everything that we could have had in a ritual. Almost everything that could have been found in a Beltane ritual could have been found in one way or another in the ritual that we were at, so I think it's as meaningful. (D-3, 16/05/2004)

Just as the marriage ceremony was a meaningful event to Norman and Sophie, the other non-traditional marking of the Beltane festival treated in this work, that which took the form of a birthday party, was likewise a powerful event for Karen. She cites as fitting that on a festival day celebrating life, a rite was held which honoured the anniversary of someone's birth.

It was extremely appropriate. It was a celebration of the anniversary of someone's year of birth - another year of life. I thought it was wonderful...It was just so fitting. This individual was slightly embarrassed. He was extremely appreciative, but he kept saying, "I can't believe you called up sacred space just to sing 'Happy Birthday' to me." The thing we tried to get through his head was the fact that you can do a ritual and honour something as "small" as a birthday, and make it a spiritual event. Beltane is all about celebrating everyday life – the joy of everyday life, and that's what it was. Yes, we went through a very formal creation of sacred space, the invocation of the elements and deity, but we did it to honour this individual, and it felt right. (D-1, 12/06/2004)

Karen continues that this event was significant in that it prompted her to create even more rites to honour the achievements of those in her circle. She expands on this by observing that Neo-Pagan seasonal festivals are increasingly moving away from their agricultural origins, and developing broader social overtones.

I'm looking forward to developing more rites to honour my students as they go through different specific achievements in their lives - not just birthdays, but other things too. Those are just as important as sabbats. In the modern world, it's difficult for us to see the agricultural cycle, and the social aspect of that cycle as well, because we get our meat at the supermarket, and we pick up our vegetables frozen. We have to look at how the year is divided into cycles and events in a slightly different way, and we see that in a social aspect more than anything else - the summer movies start coming out in May, high school and college graduations, and people start walking together outside and sitting in parks, and you start seeing that community interaction more. I think that's the way we see a lot of sabbats manifesting. Because we aren't as based on an agricultural cycle anymore, we see it socially instead. The year's cycle is still a rhythm that we're tuned to, but just in a slightly different way. (D-1, 12/06/2004)

One individual speaks in quite general terms when identifying the most meaningful aspects of the Beltane ritual: Paula, who attended the Beltane rites of the university-based organization. Paula cites that the co-organizers were all novices in Neo-Paganism, and while the ritual they held was not hugely powerful, it nonetheless created a general energy, no one aspect in particular standing out.

It was the first time, for many of them, doing a ritual, and to me they didn't really raise a lot of energy, but there was a lot of effort there. I think it was cute. I call it a cute little glow, in the sense that if it had been a bigger ritual, or with more experienced people, we probably would have felt some sort of radiation, but I think they had a cute little buzz going. It was just nice to be on the outside and look at that. It was a pretty standard ritual. They followed the order. If you look at a book, there's a skeleton of how a ritual should go, and they basically followed it, so to me, there wasn't anything particularly unique. I've been to other Beltane rituals where they've planted seeds. It's fairly common. (A-4, 14/05/2004)

Jill, a doctoral student of religion focusing on the institutionalization of Wicca in Quebec, attended the ritual of the Wiccan organization. Jill does not belong to any Neo-Pagan groups. After commenting that the ritual did not have the tone that some Beltane rituals often do, she locates the ritual's strong point in that it dealt with the fundamental themes of Beltane.

It had all the elements it needed for Beltane. It talked about Beltane, what it meant, why you're doing this (and that) part of the ritual. I think in a way, yes, it was a success; it fulfilled the needed steps to be a success. (B-3, 12/05/2004)

Significantly, Jill does, however, cite the fact that since it was a public ritual and was open to individuals "off the street," as it were, a mixture of personalities was created which caused certain celebrants to be ill at ease, perhaps detracting from their overall experience. In speaking of the feedback she received from certain participants on the matter, she says,

I know some told me that it didn't affect them. Some had to do a cleansing ritual after because of the negative vibes they said that they received from some individuals. They tried not to touch them; they tried not to be too close to them, or when they felt it, they went to the other side of the circle so they wouldn't be too close to the negative energy. For them, that area was not totally successful. (B-3, 12/05/2004)

One individual identifies the divinatory aspect of the ritual in which she participated as particularly meaningful. Annette, who participated in the private coven's marking of Beltane, identifies the insight provided in the core of the ritual, the scrying exercise, as the aspect which spoke to her the most. These insights were of both of a general and specifically spiritual nature.

Because the ritual was more a divination, it was very meaningful to me, because I got a lot of insight into some of the things that I need to work on in my life, and in the spiritual path that I'm working on. In that particular sense, I got the answers I was looking for. I didn't know what to expect from the ritual, so therefore, that's one of the reasons why I was very happy with the answers I got. (C-2, 12/06/2004)

The final section of the present chapter is, in a sense, a consideration of the data presented in both this chapter and the previous one, as the two comprise a distinct unit in the current study. Having given a full account of the Samhain and Beltane festivals as marked by the Neo-Pagan groups under examination, we must broach the fundamental

matter, based on what we have seen thus far, of the ways in which Neo-Paganism and its seasonal rituals provide practitioners with a sense of meaning. Based on interviews and observation, there appear to be a number of reasons that men and women come to and find meaning in contemporary Paganism and its ritual; the common denominator, perhaps, is a feeling that “mainstream” religion is not entirely fulfilling. The scenario often appears to play out in one of two ways: first, individuals may somehow be exposed to Neo-Paganism, typically after a period of soul searching and questioning, and embrace the tradition as “feeling right” and providing the fulfillment they are lacking; they may then abandon their existing religious pathway (should they have one), or, much less frequently, may combine it with contemporary Paganism. Alternately, men and women who have a more pronounced sense of dissatisfaction with mainstream traditions may come to Neo-Paganism by actively seeking a spiritual pathway more in line with their values (such as a respect for the dead, as indicated above). In both scenarios, men and women often report feeling that they have “come home” in practicing Neo-Paganism. In specific terms, however, what are the sought-after qualities that mainstream traditions and their concomitant rituals do not provide these men and women, qualities which they do indeed find in Neo-Paganism and its rites?

Primary among them, it seems, is personal growth and empowerment through the performance of ritual and the working of magic, something practitioners feel is not provided by more traditional spiritual paths. When interviewed, several of the men and women participating in this study focused on Neo-Pagan ritual as a vehicle of individual development and change. This is indicated by the above references to the Samhain ritual helping with the elimination of bad habits from one’s life, or to the ritual marking Beltane

as providing inspiration for the completion of new projects and plans. It appears that for more than a few contemporary Pagans, the matter of using ritual and magic as a manner of taking control of one's life is an important aspect of its meaningfulness and appeal.

Also in the area of empowerment, the grassroots, "do-it-yourself" quality present in Neo-Pagan ritual appears to be liberating for many practitioners of the tradition. The fact that all followers of contemporary Paganism can organize and lead rituals seems to bring about feelings of freedom and of control over one's own connection with the divine. This dynamic stands in stark opposition to the more rigid hierarchy present in mainstream traditions. The lack of mediators (such as priests, rabbis, etc.) that is present in traditional faiths indeed appears to be an appealing quality. True, a hierarchy of sorts does exist in contemporary Pagan practice, as some men and women never lead their own rituals, instead partaking of group rituals in which an established high priest and priestess are in charge of the proceedings; moreover, some individuals are indeed accredited Neo-Pagan clergypersons (such as Charlotte). These individuals, however, although respected for their experience, expertise, and knowledge, are also typically viewed as approachable teachers or mentors, and not as austere, remote, traditional authority figures.

Social issues, such as feminist causes and environmental concerns, seem to form another aspect of the meaningfulness and appeal of Neo-Paganism and its ritual. The fact that modern-day Paganism and its ritual speaks of goddess as well as god, and is a tradition very much in harmony with the rhythms of the natural world, allows participants to partake of a spiritual path which matches their concerns. As indicated in the interviews above, Samhain and Beltane rituals appear to be meaningful to many men and women in that they involve the honouring of both goddess and god (and the union of the

two), and because they connect participants to changes occurring in the natural world. A number of individuals cited the fact that many mainstream traditions, on the other hand, do not place similar value on these issues. As a consequence, men and women with feminist and environmental interests express the feeling that they have “come home” in following Neo-Paganism and engaging in its rituals.

This having been said, we must consider another aspect of the issue: the possibility that deriving a genuine sense of meaning from a ritual experience is in direct proportion to the degree to which an individual is a true follower of the group conducting a given ritual, and a true believer in that group’s worldview. In some cases, Neo-Pagans solidly commit to a particular group (a coven), actually becoming dedicants and pledging to study within the group for a particular period of time (as was the case with the private coven whose Beltane ritual we considered, for a period of a year and a day). These groups meet and hold rituals regularly, and the men and women who join them follow a demanding course of study which involves great commitment. For these individuals, group rituals are likely deep, important events which inspire reflection and provoke profound thought, reinforcing the ties they feel to the organizations of which they are members.

Despite this, there also appears to be a certain amount of exploration and experimentation among some practitioners of Neo-Paganism. A number of the men and women interviewed in the current study stipulate that they have not been formally initiated into any particular Neo-Pagan pathway; some of them are content to remain solitary practitioners who partake irregularly of group proceedings, while others are actively looking for an organization that responds to their needs. When these individuals

partake of a given group's rituals, to a certain degree, they are indeed "exploring," using ritual as a means of testing out their spiritual options. The connection that they form with a given group may be a strong one, if the group and the rites it carries out match their own needs; in such a case, the ritual may be a meaningful event for the participant. Conversely, the connection formed with a particular group may be much less deep, should individuals feel the organization and its rites unsuitable and decide to move on to another; in such a case, a ritual may, in fact, be unfulfilling. (This is perhaps the reason that we noted several new faces at some of the Beltane rituals.)

It is essential to note that at the other end of the spectrum from the "exploring" seekers are mentors and group leaders. If some newcomers to contemporary Paganism make use of rituals to explore and attempt to identify the spiritual path they wish to follow, as outlined above, experienced practitioners make use of the same rituals to give the newcomers the occasion for exploration, conducting the best rituals possible in order to create this opportunity. (Moreover, through performing high-quality rituals, group leaders are also able to arouse and hold participants' interest in their groups.) As earlier mentioned, this satisfaction in conducting successful rituals which are significant events for participants is in and of itself a source of meaningfulness.

In concluding this chapter, a brief reiteration of its key points is in order. We have established that the festival of Beltane appears to be important to followers of contemporary Paganism for a number of common reasons: the celebration of the literal fertility in spring as well as fertility in a figurative sense. Both of these concepts, the fecundity found in the natural world in early May, as well as the inspiration and creativity involved in the development of new projects and ideas, are powerful ideas to Neo-

Pagans. The rituals they create explore these themes in varying manners, and these rituals, in turn, inspire a variety of responses among practitioners. We have also begun to touch upon the matter which is at the heart of this work, and have reached a preliminary observation: in general terms, men and women are attracted to and find meaning in contemporary Paganism and its ritual for a variety of reasons, but all rooted primarily in a lack of fulfillment by mainstream traditions. This having been duly noted, we will shift our focus to the theories of ritual of a number of scholars, and use their models as a lens through which to view the rituals observed in this study, shedding greater light on the significance Neo-Pagan ritual has for followers of the tradition.

CHAPTER 5

AN EXAMINATION OF SAMHAIN AND BELTANE RITUALS FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF ELIADE AND TURNER

In shifting our focus to the ways in which scholarly perspectives on ritual can shed light on the markings of Samhain and Beltane examined in this work, we will first consider the theories of Romanian historian of religion Mircea Eliade and British anthropologist Victor Turner (more precisely, an extension of Turner's model by Neo-Pagan scholar Loretta Orion). The two are considered in the same chapter because the insights they provide, given the focus of this work, complement each other well. First, we will turn to the view of ritual of Eliade.

Mircea Eliade's Model of Ritual

At the outset, we must note that although Eliade focuses primarily on "primitive" religion in the development of his view of ritual, his theory is most applicable to the Neo-Pagan tradition as well, given that contemporary Pagan ritual is inspired by the practices of a "primitive" people: the ancient Celts. Of especial interest to us, in that it sheds particular light on the data collected in the present research, is Eliade's contention that ritual is a repetition of cosmogonic myth which makes men and women "real," regenerates human existence, and abolishes history.¹ We will begin our treatment of the issue with an overview of Eliade's theory of ritual; we will then use this model as a tool to illuminate the celebrations of Samhain and Beltane by the groups featuring in this work.

Eliade broaches the matter at hand by arguing that rituals constitute a return to the time of the beginning of creation through the repetition of archetypal acts by gods,

ancestors, or heroes, pointing to the reality in illo tempore (before “history” began).² All important acts, in fact, were so revealed; humankind merely repeats them through rituals, which are thus based on a divine model, an archetype.³ It follows that an act performed by men and women becomes “real” in that it is the repetition of a celestial archetype, acquiring meaning and reality to the degree to which it repeats a primordial act instituted at the beginning of the universe;⁴ in fact, people themselves are “real” only insofar as they cease being themselves, and repeat gestures of another.⁵ Eliade continues that for “primitive peoples,” every act which has a definite meaning (hunting fishing, agriculture, games, conflicts, sexuality) in some way participates in the sacred; the only profane activities are those which are without these exemplary models.⁶ As pointed out by Canadian scholar of religion Ronald Grimes, for Eliade, as narrative accounts of the acts of creation, myths often serve as models for rituals.⁷

Building on the above contention, Eliade argues that through rituals which emulate the cosmogonic act, there exists for primitive societies a regeneration of time which occurs with the celebration of each new year;⁸ it is this idea which is of particular interest in the current study. Indeed, Eliade suggests that there exists a conception of the end and the beginning of a temporal period in archaic religion, the confines of which are based on observations of biocosmic rhythms; significantly, this temporal period forms part of a larger system: the system of the periodic regeneration of life.⁹ The rituals which occur at the beginning of the new year (including ritual combats between two groups of actors, the presence of the dead, and sexual orgies) denote that the end of the old year and beginning of the new constitute a repetition of the mythical moment of the passage from chaos to cosmos.¹⁰ Every new year is, therefore, is tantamount to the

resuming of time from the beginning, or a repetition of the cosmogony.¹¹ Stated differently, the regeneration of time which occurs in primitive societies is an effort to restore (at least temporarily) mythical and primordial time; in doing this, the creation of the world is reproduced (in fact, destroyed and recreated) every year.¹²

It is significant that through these rituals which imitate archetypes and repeat paradigmatic gestures, such as those at new year, there occurs an actual abolition of past time.¹³ Eliade argues that in primitive societies, through rite, profane time is suspended, history is abolished, and people are transported via ritual to the mythical time which the rituals emulate; archetypal acts take place at exactly the same primordial mythical moment as the act they are repeating.¹⁴ During the days preceding and following the new year, for example, profane time is suspended, and there is a paradoxical realization of a coexistence of “past” and “present.”¹⁵ All barriers between the living and the dead are broken down; a primordial unity occurs, as a “nocturnal” regime comes to be in which limits and distances are indiscernible.¹⁶

The Romanian scholar of religion continues that through ritual, at the time of the new year, “archaic” men and women recover the possibility of definitively transcending time and living in eternity.¹⁷ They are more creative than their modern counterparts, who see themselves as creative only in respect to history. Every year, individuals from “archaic” societies take part in the repetition of the cosmogony, the ultimate creative act.¹⁸

The use of Mircea Eliade’s perspective as a means to interpret the data collected in this study offers a number of insights into the rituals we have examined. As regards both the markings of the Samhain and Beltane festivals, the Romanian scholar’s

contention that archetypal acts are repeated on auspicious occasions goes a long way toward deepening our understanding of each group's creation of the magic circle in which their rituals were to take place. We now see that the straightforward act of requesting the presence of the elemental quarters at the opening of each ritual, and the corresponding rite of representing each of the four elements, could be viewed, in a loose sense, as an emulation of the primordial act of transforming chaos into creation. Assembling the spirits of the four cardinal points and the elements to which they are linked in order to create the sacred space in which a ritual is to occur could be likened to the creation of order from disorder at the beginning of time; the entire process could thus be viewed as a "cosmicization" of space.¹⁹

As regards the markings of the October 31 festival in particular, Eliade's argument that new year rituals constitute a regeneration of time, and that profane time is abolished during the transitory period, rings true with the way each of the groups in this study chose to mark Samhain. Through perceiving the festival as a marking of the end of the old year and the beginning of the new, each of the groups attempted to essentially "wipe the slate clean" and annul their personal history, allowing them to enter the new year unbridled by past hindrances. Similarly, each of the groups acknowledged the transitory period in which "profane time" is put on hold, the past and present exist simultaneously, and the walls between the living and the dead crumble.

Specific instances of this are easily observed in the way Neo-Pagans dealt with the two principal themes identified in the Samhain rites under study: the banishing of negativity and the honouring of death and the dead. As regards the banishing of negativity, each of the groups under consideration did indeed seek to rid themselves of

past hindrances and, to a degree, “annul personal history” in their rituals. The students at the school of Paganism, we note, set about doing this by reading a text which stated that “before we embark of this new year full of challenges, we want to end the old year by banishing any negativity which may have attached itself to us over the year.” Organizers also asked celebrants to concentrate on negative aspects of the previous year, and focus that negativity on the communal burning candle that was being circulated around the room. Clearly, group organizers were seeking to open up the possibility for participants to begin the new year with a fresh, new approach to living. Leaders of the province-wide Wiccan organization accomplished something very similar by asking those attending their ritual to write an undesirable personality trait which they possessed on a piece of paper, then to ritually burn it in a common fire. Looking at the event through the lens provided by Eliade, we see that the profound meaning of these acts was that they constituted an effort to permit participants to free themselves from what they had been in the past, and to create a new self by, to a certain extent, annulling their history.

Eliade’s arguments enable us to see that the university society also endeavoured to allow participants to begin the new year afresh, rife with new opportunities, but went about it in a way that was perhaps more subtle. Rather than banish negative elements from the previous year and actively “wipe the slate clean,” organizers called upon celebrants to engage in personal reflection regarding the outgoing year, and to similarly reflect upon (or “divine”) what the new year might hold for them. Given the timing – the transitory period between two years – the thoughts and concerns of all participants could not help but be ways to transform their lives in order to improve their quality of existence. This was, however, not explicitly stated, as participants were left on their own

to reach this conclusion and take the appropriate steps to effect positive change in their lives. Using Eliade's model, it is clear that what each of the groups was doing was creating the freedom in which participants could explore new possibilities and "re-invent" themselves at a critical point in the annual cycle; perhaps more than simply ridding themselves of some of the negative aspects of the previous year, they sought to open up a range of possibilities, to explore new ways of being.

The other theme explored by these groups was the honouring of death and the dead; in their treatment of this theme, celebrants did indeed attempt to abolish profane time to acknowledge the proximity of departed ancestors. One manifestation of this was the recitation of incantations and chants which were clear expressions of that idea. Keeping in mind Eliade's contentions regarding the new year, they can be viewed as recognition by Neo-Pagans of the coming of the dark time of the annual cycle, and of the proximity of the dead to the living. Indeed, this was most evident as ritual organizers at the school of Paganism said "Blessings be upon the dead that know, blessings be upon the dead that guard, blessings be upon the dead that are;" group leaders at the university society declared "...this is the time of the eighth and final turn of your earthly wheel of the year, the death of the seasonal cycle;" and organizers of the province-wide Wiccan group's ritual stated, "I underline...the disappearance of those who have preceded us and those who will follow us in death." Along the same lines, each of the groups recounted myths which spoke of death and rebirth (the descent of Persephone and the story of Avalon); keeping in mind Eliade's argument, we see that this focus on death and departed ancestors occurred because practitioners felt the dead to be remarkably close at Samhain,

the Neo-Pagan new year, a point in the year at which time is abolished and a sort of primordial unity occurs.

Another way in which the veneration of the deceased was manifested by all the groups under study lay in their invitation to celebrants to publicly acknowledge the death of a loved one. We recall that the university society and the province-wide Wiccan organization recognized this through asking celebrants to speak publicly of a departed loved one; the school of Paganism did this through a written format. Using Eliade's model, we remark that in doing so, celebrants were again acknowledging the absence of temporal limits and boundaries at Samhain, and the resulting nearness of departed loved ones.

We will now use Eliade's model of ritual as a lens through which to view the Beltane celebrations considered in this study. It is important to note that the Romanian scholar's arguments concerning the regeneration of time relate primarily to new year festivals; despite this, this aspect of his theory of ritual is most applicable to the Neo-Pagan festival of Beltane as well. Although it is Samhain which is the actual celebration of the new year for modern-day Pagans, we recall that Beltane marks the beginning of the "light half of the year;" consequently, as the marker of a end of a distinct temporal period and the beginning of a new one, and given the scope of this work, the use of Eliade's model of ritual is most appropriate here. Indeed, when applied to the markings of the festival of Beltane, the Romanian scholar's arguments again ring true; in their May 1 rituals, there also occurred for Neo-Pagans the phenomenon of collective regeneration, as the focus was even more strongly on "newness" (in the form of new beginnings and projects) than had been the case at Samhain. If the rituals of Samhain allowed men and

women to celebrate these new beginnings by “wiping the slate clean,” the rituals marking Beltane permitted participants to celebrate them through filling the new slate with exciting, inspired new ideas.

Specific examples of this are easily identified in the manners in which each of the groups dealt with the primary theme of Beltane, the twin concepts of physical fertility and, perhaps more importantly, spiritual fertility. Each of the rituals did indeed attempt to honour not only the fecundity of nature but the concomitant concept of creativity surrounding the festival. The university society, we recall, asked participants to plant seeds to mark the fertility of nature in early May; we note that this was an attempt to recognize and celebrate the newness occurring in the natural world, and also the concomitant new projects and inspirations which were developing and coming to fruition in their personal lives. Through this ritual, men and women had the opportunity to acknowledge new, developing conditions and realities, and formally honour the positive transformations which were occurring. The province-wide Wiccan organization did something very similar when they asked celebrants to make a wish (in lieu of the more traditional jumping over the Beltane fire) as one aspect of the central portion of the May first ritual. It is clear that this was an effort to permit men and women the freedom to acknowledge and make real the new realities they wished to create in their lives. The ritual of the private coven accomplished this by having celebrants scry for insight in a need fire. We see that they were likely attempting to receive the inspiration to embark upon new pathways and explore new options; through gazing into the flames of the divinatory fire, the men and women involved were, in all probability, endeavouring to decode the messages regarding new plans and projects which the divine was providing

them at this auspicious time of new beginnings. Bearing in mind Eliade's arguments, we remark that what the groups were doing in their rituals was allowing men and women to once again "re-invent" themselves, though not in quite the same way as at Samhain; at Beltane, it was done through a focus on new beginnings and an embracing of the creative spark at this most opportune time of the year.

Before concluding our consideration of Eliade, a final matter to address is the argument that the application of this model of ritual to the celebrations of the groups under study has been merely a test of the model's validity as regards these groups; it could also be said that it has confirmed what was earlier established in this work. This is indeed a valid contention. The point of going about things in this manner, however, lies in the fact that it is not a useless exercise to employ a theoretical framework to both back up and deepen our understanding of facts which may already have been established. Having a fully-developed model through which to view data serves, in and of itself, to illuminate certain aspects of that data and assist us in considering it in new ways.

We may conclude our treatment of Eliade's theory of ritual by reiterating a handful of key points. Through viewing rituals as imitations of celestial archetypes, we have come to see that Neo-Pagan ritual does indeed seek to emulate primordial, divine gestures from the beginning of time. In particular, by considering Eliade's arguments that an abolition and regeneration of time occur between temporal periods, we have observed that rituals marking the October 31 festival honour death and the dead, permitting men and women to feel the proximity of deceased ancestors in the primordial unity of Samhain. Perhaps more importantly, the use of Eliade's model give us further evidence that that both Samhain and Beltane rituals are important to Neo-Pagans in that

they allow men and women, albeit it in different ways, to annul their personal history and re-invent themselves, thereby laying the foundation of personal growth and transformation; this is an important realization indeed as we continue to fine tune our image of how seasonal rituals are important to practitioners of Neo-Paganism.

Victor Turner's Model of Ritual (as extended by Loretta Orion)

We may now examine the data compiled in the present research through the spectacles provided by Victor Turner, particularly the English anthropologist's conception of liminality in ritual. To be more precise, we will look at the material through a utilization of Turner's theory of ritual as exemplified by Neo-Pagan scholar Loretta Orion's extension of that model. Advanced by Orion specifically to study Neo-Pagan ritual, this utilization of Turner's model views the rituals of contemporary Pagans as opportunities for practitioners to turn away from the dominant models of western culture, and discover ways of revising themselves and society.²⁰ We will begin our treatment of the matter with a brief summary of the pertinent aspects of Turner's theory of ritual, and will then turn to Orion's utilization of Turner's view. Following this, we will examine the data collected in the current study using Orion's extension of this model.

In considering rites of passage, Victor Turner cites Arnold van Gennep in identifying three stages. The first phase (of separation) is made up of symbolic behaviour which signifies the separation of the person or persons from either an earlier established point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions, or from both of these. During the intervening "liminal" stage, the ritual subject's qualities are unclear, as he goes through a cultural area that closely resembles neither the past nor the coming state.

The third phase, which we may call “reincorporation,” involves the actual consummation of the passage. Once again, the ritual subject is in a stable state; as a consequence of this, the individual has particular obligations regarding others, and particular rights, which are clearly defined and “structural.” It is expected that the man or woman in question will comport himself or herself in accordance with given ethical standards and customary norms, standards and norms which are binding on holders of social position in a system of such positions.²¹

In elaborating upon the matter of liminality, Turner continues that the qualities of the concept are ambiguous by nature, given that both this condition and these men and women do not fit neatly into the categories that typically situate, in cultural space, conditions and positions. Liminal entities do not occupy a distinct, identifiable place; they are betwixt and between the positions which custom, ceremony, law, and convention prescribe.²² It follows from this that in societies which formally ritualize transitions of a cultural and social nature, an extensive range of symbols expresses their unclear, murky characteristics. Liminality is, therefore, frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.²³ Turner continues that liminal entities, such as initiates in puberty rites, are, for all intents and purposes, reduced to a uniform condition to be “remade” and bestowed with additional powers to arm them with what they need to cope with their new position in life.²⁴ These neophytes typically develop strong bonds of camaraderie and equality, or “*communitas*,” as differences in status are eliminated.²⁵

Significantly, Turner situates rituals’ transformative power in the circumstance of liminality, describing this powerful experiential phase as “an interval, however brief, of

margin or limen, when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance.”²⁶ This powerful condition of marginality is present in many societies, actually constituting the “Achilles heel” in the structuring process, a process outlined by Turner as one of containing new growth in orderly patterns or schemata of social structure.²⁷ In the “antistructural” moments of liminality, Turner identifies a “liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, from...normative constraints...”²⁸

In a unique manner, Loretta Orion extends and applies Turner’s theory of ritual (particularly as regards liminality), thereby creating an innovative approach through which to view Neo-Pagan rites. She outlines her theory in her *Never Again the Burning Times*, particularly in a section of the work entitled “The Transformative Potential of Rituals.” Orion states that rather than periodic refreshments between phases of social structure that processual rituals usually provide, liminality at Neo-Pagan gatherings facilitates the discovery of a radically different point of view that might point the way to a revision of self and society.²⁹ Crossing the consecrated circle, Orion continues, is a way for celebrants to step into the betwixt-and-between ritual space (or condition), and to liberate themselves from Western culture’s confining paradigms (she cites in particular those rooted in Christian patriarchy).³⁰ In ritual space, the law of cause and effect are believed by Neo-Pagans to function on entirely different principles; following from this, anything appears to be possible. Dreamed-of alternatives to the existing state of affairs appear reachable, as men and women are, “in the company of the gods,” empowered to consider alternative ways of being; they are able to have belief in their visions, and be

resolute in their decision to return to the social structure empowered and positively changed by epiphanies they have had in ritual space.³¹

Orion continues that all innovations in culture grow out of the imaginations of individuals; Wicca, she contends, is the heir to the older western spiritual tradition in which there exist ways of developing this imagination and creativity.³² Orion cites as significant Turner's idea of the "liminoid," like but not identical to the liminal, which involves the shift of the power of liminality from the realm of communal rites to the area of individualistic art and leisure activities found in post-industrial societies.³³ While Turner focuses to these liminoid genres in non-ritual contexts, Orion locates them within not only Neo-Pagan gatherings, but also within individual rituals.³⁴ Contemporary Pagans, she argues, make use of these liminoid genres (such as drama, poetry, song, and dance) at both assemblies and particular rituals to act as catalysts through which celebrants may be transported into a realm of open-ended, possibly ecstatic experience. New themes and different points of view are introduced by profound dramas, and ritual participants are, at pivotal points, left to experience a personal vision, one which may be profoundly moving and potentially life-altering.³⁵ Typically, the high priest or priestess lays down a clear model for this transformation (similar to the manner in which tribal leaders furnished well-defined new roles for initiates in agricultural and horticultural societies).³⁶

Orion's utilization of Turner's model of ritual sheds a great deal of light on the rituals of Neo-Pagans; we will begin by using it a lens through which to view the Samhain rituals of the groups under study. In doing so, we see that much as Orion argues, each of the markings of the festivals consisted of rites of which the express goal was to

trigger a psychological response in celebrants, leading to an altered vision of self and society; it was a process which took several forms. In first considering the ritual of the school of Paganism, Orion's theory highlights the fact that chanting, music, and recitations were used in an attempt to bring about such radical shifts in thinking. Specifically, we recall the use of the chant and drumming that accompanied the placing of cut-out apples on the Tree of Avalon. The recitation of poetry (and didactic readings) was also used in the ritual, occurring at the outset, after the Tree of Avalon ceremony, and following the banishing rite. As Orion suggests, then, the above-mentioned elements were instances of liminoid genres being used to bring celebrants to new realizations during the ritual.

A number of participants, when interviewed, cited that the ritual was a profound experience for them, mirroring the claims Orion makes about what these rites endeavour to accomplish. Specifically, participants made mention of the fact that the ritual brought about new views on life and death, as they were better able to put into perspective the loss of recently-departed loved ones through participation in the Samhain proceedings. (The two organizers who were interviewed for the current study were notable exceptions to this; we recall their observation that they were too nervous, given the nature of their roles, to fully reap the benefits of the ritual.)

Orion's use of Turner's model of ritual rings true with the Samhain ritual of the university-based organization as well. Her arguments highlight the fact that the group's use of drama, the reading of didactic poetry and texts, and dance were efforts to lead celebrants to new perspectives and insights. In particular, we recall that high drama figured prominently in the proceedings. Throughout the ritual, a number of participants

took on characters (the maiden, the mother, and the crone, representing the three phases of life) and dispensed, while in character, carefully crafted lines designed to profoundly affect celebrants (such as the call to gaze into the mirror, and to ritually eat a pomegranate). The recitation of didactic texts and poetry was also done, such as when celebrants “raised the cone of power.” Dancing figured into the ritual, as a spiral dance was performed near the end of the rites.

As regards the actual effectiveness and success with which this was done, interviews with participants (as well as observations of men and women not involved in this study) indicate that, to a great degree, the ritual of the university-based organization constituted a meaningful experience for the men and women involved. The Samhain rites appeared to cause participants to reflect upon new points of view on death and on “closing finished chapters” in one’s life. Given that the ritual was a public one, however, it is beyond doubt that such poignant moments were not experienced by all celebrants. For some curiosity-seekers who may have been in attendance, it was certainly far less meaningful an experience, perhaps merely a change from the usual routine.

Loretta Orion’s use of the Turnerian theory of ritual also underlines the Wiccan organization’s use of drama as well as well as the recitation of poetry and myth to bring about illuminations in the ritual space, allowing men and women to receive personal visions at key points during the celebration. We recall that the formal recounting, by participants, of the loss of loved ones injected “real-life” drama into the proceedings; along the same lines, the ritual burning of negativity, in the form of undesirable habits written on slips of paper, was a “dramatic” act. The recitation of poetry and didactic tales

punctuated the ritual on numerous occasions, such as when it accompanied the rite celebrating the union of the god and goddess.

As regards the degree to which the ritual successfully carried out what it aimed to accomplish, interviews with participants suggest that they did indeed feel moved in some way by the proceedings, which again afforded them new perspectives on death, and helping put into perspective past losses they may have experienced. As was the case with the ritual of the university society, given that theirs was a public ritual, there were likely a certain number of curiosity seekers in attendance, individuals for whom the event was perhaps more a “holiday from ordinary routines” than anything else.

Just as Loretta Orion’s extension of Victor Turner’s model of ritual sheds light on the rituals celebrating the Samhain festival, its application to the markings of the Beltane festival considered in this work is similarly useful. The model underlines the fact that the university organization’s use of singing as well as didactic poetry and recitations in ritual constituted an effort to bring about revelations and transformation in ritual space. We are reminded in particular that the proceedings made extensive use of song, primarily during the seed-planting rite. This rite was also accompanied by a recitation of a didactic poem.

Interviews with participants suggest that for many men and women, the ritual did indeed serve as a springboard for reflection and a reconsidering of self; comments made at the post-ritual feast by particular individuals appear to back this up. Cited in particular was the energy created by the rites (one would have to think that this energy was viewed as of a transforming nature). Once again, given that this ritual was a public one, chances are that a certain number of men and women were there primarily out of curiosity; for

them, the proceedings were likely less meaningful, constituting simply a break from the ordinary.

As regards the May 1 ritual of the Wiccan organization, Orion's arguments again showcase the fact that components such as the recitation of didactic tales and the use of drama were attempts to propel those in attendance into the realm of open-ended experience which might facilitate the discovery of new perspectives and points of view. We recall that a recitation of a didactic bent was made regarding the profound significance of Beltane, and likewise remember that drama figured into the ritual as the high priest and high priestess took on the roles of the god and goddess, simulating the union of the two.

We may conclude that for many participants in this ritual, the proceedings did indeed lead to some sort of revising of self; interviews and observations indicate that certain individuals seemed genuinely affected by the experience they had shared, gaining insights into new plans and projects they wished to carry out. As noted earlier, however, individuals "off the street" were free to attend the ritual, distracting, in fact, some serious participants; for the curiosity seeker, the experience was most likely not a profound one, but merely a way to satisfy an interest in something that appeared to be new and different.

The private coven's marking of the May 1 festival, though not using the genres of arts and leisure activities as a vehicle, was clearly designed to create a transformative experience for group members. We are reminded that the centerpiece of the ritual of the private coven involved a "personal encounter with the divine" as men and women gazed into a divinatory fire in order to receive inspiration. The express purpose of the ritual

was thus to bring celebrants to new perspectives and inspire creativity and new thinking whilst “in the company of the gods,” much as Loretta Orion suggests. Ritual organizers likely constructed their marking of the Beltane festival around this centerpiece in order to create the sort of radically new thinking and illuminations which Orion speaks of in her use of Turner’s model. The private coven’s ritual was thus a carefully designed attempt to unleash ritual’s transformative potential.

By all accounts, the private coven’s Beltane ritual was a profound experience for all participants. Very much in keeping with what Orion claims these rites aim to do, individuals indicated that they felt themselves in the presence of a profound sacred reality that gave them cause to pause, reflect, and venerate (we recall that one of the express goals of the ritual was to allow individuals to encounter the divine on their own terms).

A final insight provided by Orion’s use of Turner’s model, an insight not directly related to the use of liminoid genres in ritual, will now be considered. We note that in the six rituals observed in this study, celebrants conducted their rites within a magic circle. Ritual organizers began by purifying the space, then casting the circle in which the proceedings were to occur. We are reminded of Orion’s argument that even before a ritual begins, the very act of physically crossing the threshold marking the consecrated circle allows Neo-Pagan ritual celebrants to pass into a realm in which they might liberate themselves. Her contention showcases that the care taken by each group in establishing the perimeters of the magic circle was an effort to create a sacred place, a place “between the worlds,” a domain between the realm of humans and that of the gods, in which extraordinary, transformative rites might take place.

Not unrelated to this is the fact that in each of the Samhain and Beltane rituals under consideration, guardians of the watchtowers were summoned through the calling of the quarter elementals, and the god and goddess were likewise invoked. Bearing in mind Orion's argument that "individuals feel empowered in the company of the gods to imagine alternatives," we remark that the calling of these supernatural entities by each group was an effort to aid participants in developing personal visions through having other-than-human entities present as sources of strength and motivation. Otherwise put, one of the reasons that the groups under study invoked the gods in their rituals was for the crucial role the proximity of the gods plays in empowering men and women to gain a new perspective on a variety of important issues.

Interviews indicate that much as Orion suggests, a certain number of celebrants participating in these rituals experienced the circle as a space in which the laws of cause and effect of the "outside world" were negated; these individuals experienced it as a realm governed by other principles – in short, a world in which magic and transformation could take place. One interviewee spoke of the "trance-like state" experienced upon being in the circle. Another made reference to the empowerment she felt when being in the presence of the gods. Such pivotal moments were certainly not experienced by all those in attendance; for some individuals, those who were not serious practitioners and who were merely experimenting, strong feelings likely did not emanate from the magic circle of the presence of sacred realities, but simply from the "thrill" of trying something new and exciting. For more dedicated practitioners, however, being in the magic circle in the presence of sacred realities appears to have been a powerful moment indeed.

As an important note, before concluding this chapter, the disclaimer which was issued earlier when the theory of Mircea Eliade was considered must be restated. True, the application of Orion's Turner-based model to our data does, to a certain degree, constitute the testing of that model's relevance to the groups under study; moreover, it backs up what has already been established. Once again, the rationale behind doing this is that a straightforward application of this theoretical framework nonetheless provides a new way of looking at the subject matter, and will enable us to come to a more profound understanding of facts which may already be known.

The models of Eliade and Turner-Orion have been included in the same chapter of this work for a particular reason, as they lead us to related insights concerning the question we are attempting to answer about the meaningfulness of seasonal rituals for Neo-Pagans. Specifically, the use of both of these models indicates that these rituals are a vehicle to personal growth and change. Eliade's model shows us that this occurs as individuals negate the past, embrace new options, and re-invent themselves through ritual, while Turner-Orion's leads us to see that this takes place as men and women experience epiphanies, leading to change, through the ritual use of liminoid genres. Through the use of scholarly perspectives on ritual, we are coming to a fuller understanding of the issue which is at the core of this work; we will continue to do this as we shift our focus to the models of two other scholars in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

AN EXAMINATION OF SAMHAIN AND BELTANE RITUALS FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF DURKHEIM AND BIRD

We will now consider the rituals marking the Samhain and Beltane festivals from the perspectives of French sociologist Emile Durkheim and Canadian scholar of religion Frederick Bird. These two models are grouped together in the same chapter because some of the key insights they provide are very much related, complementing one another nicely. We will begin with a consideration of the model of ritual of Emile Durkheim.

Emile Durkheim's Model of Ritual

Of particular interest to us is Durkheim's argument viewing ritual as strengthening the bonds attaching the individual to society,¹ and his related ideas concerning collective effervescence.² As was the case with the perspective on ritual of Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade, it must be noted that much of Durkheim's view of ritual pertains specifically to "primitive" traditions; we must remember, however, that contemporary Pagans base their rituals on an ancient people- the Celts - meaning that the use of the Durkheimian model is particularly appropriate in the current study. We will begin our consideration of the matter at hand with a brief overview of the pertinent aspects of Durkheim's theory of ritual. Following this will be the actual use of this model to examine the markings of the festivals of October 31 and May 1 considered in this work, beginning with the festival of Samhain.

Scholar Steven Lukes classifies Emile Durkheim's hypotheses of religion into three principal groupings: the causal, the representational, and the functional;³ we will first consider aspects of Durkheim's contentions within the last of these three realms.

The French sociologist argues that cult practices are more than mere movements devoid of importance, and not simply empty gestures;⁴ in fact, it is through these ritual practices that religion performs an important social function. On one level, these practices serve to reinforce the connections between the individual and his or her god; building upon this, on another level, given that the god is the non-literal expression of the society, ritual serves to reinforce the bonds which attach men and women to the society to which they belong.⁵

Canadian scholar of religion Frances Westley, in her *The Complex Forms of the Religious Life: A Durkheimian View of New Religious Movements*, clarifies matters in pointing out Durkheim's contention that this bond between religion and society is such that religion functions to order life in both the individual and societal realms.⁶

Significantly, in the individual realm, it is through ritual that religion does this; indeed, interactions with the sacred at collective gatherings – contained within ritual acts – serve to regulate both one's motivations and one's behaviour. These rites are prescribed by all religions, and may serve to either empower (in the case of positive rituals) or restrict (in the case of negative rituals) the individual.⁷ In the larger realm, Westley highlights Durkheim's argument that religion orders life through conserving the social order and furnishing social integration on a moral and cultural level.⁸

A related aspect of Durkheim's model of ritual which may be placed in his causal grouping of hypotheses of religion is his perspective on collective effervescence.

Durkheim contends that men and women gather for religious ceremonies at specified points after having been separated for a period of time; in the case of aboriginal

Australians, this may be when individuals re-assemble after being divided for extended

periods into individual family units, hunting and fishing.⁹ The actual act of gathering is a significant form of stimulant, Durkheim continues, as feelings of effervescence heighten and produce otherwise unheard of behaviour.¹⁰ After a collective effervescence, individuals feel themselves taken into a different world, and sacred beings, created by collective thought, achieve great intensity when men and women are assembled and are in direct contact with each other, partaking of the same sentiment and idea.¹¹ Durkheim contends that within certain social situations, specifically those of collective effervescence, religious beliefs and sentiments are generated and recreated; originating in this effervescence, Durkheim therefore argues, religious ideas appear to be born.¹²

Having considered the aspects of Emile Durkheim's theory which are most useful to us, given the focus of the present research, we will now use the theory as a filter through which to interpret our data, beginning with the celebrations of Samhain. Bearing in mind the argument that ritual serves to reinforce the connections between the individual and the society of which he or she is a member, we may consider the October 31 rituals with new eyes. What we see is that contrary to Durkheim's view of the function of ritual, the rites performed by each of the three groups served, in fact, not to strengthen the social bonds between men and women and the society to which they belong; quite the opposite, they functioned as a means for them to distance themselves from it. The very readiness with which each of the Neo-Pagan groups in question broached in their rituals the matter of death, the most prominent motif at Samhain, indicates a significant difference between their perspective on the issue and that of society at large, a society in which the subject of death is very much taboo. Moreover, core beliefs of Neo-Pagans – among them pantheism, polytheism, and the recognition of

both male and female principles of divinity – figured prominently in the rituals they carried out; once again, these are values which are not held by the dominant culture.

As regards more specific examples from the rituals under observation, we recall that the groups in this study invoked gods and goddesses, spoke of reincarnation, and raised collective energy in their rites; in doing so, they engaged in practices not embraced by the wider society. Rites such as the school of Paganism's utilization of psychic energy to rid oneself of negativity, the province-wide Wiccan organization's invitation to burn strips of paper in a communal fire to achieve the same goal, and the university-based group's use of a scrying mirror to glimpse into the incoming year similarly set celebrants apart from the status quo, perhaps only momentarily, or perhaps in a more lasting manner. It follows, therefore, that through enacting their rites, men and women effectively turned away from the dominant culture in some key ways.

If the Samhain rituals carried out by each group did not, therefore, reinforce the bonds between celebrants and the dominant society, did they serve to strengthen bonds of identification and affection on a much smaller scale, between the individual and the Neo-Pagan community? Did these rituals foster the building of a genuine Neo-Pagan society, one reflective of the basic concerns and beliefs of practitioners? An authoritative answer to this question would necessitate questioning ritual celebrants as to the frequency with which they see their fellow ritual participants on a social level, and to what extent they have feelings of affinity with these men and women. We are reminded that the current study was conducted in such a way as to illuminate the seasonal rituals of Neo-Pagan groups, and not to directly address the matter of the Neo-Pagan sense of community. Despite this, this issue was dealt with more than superficially in the current research, as a

number of the questions asked in interviews broached that very subject; observations which were conducted shed a certain amount of light on the issue as well. It was, in the final analysis, dealt with in enough detail that we may forward a hypothesis on the matter.

Having issued the above caveat, we can hypothesize, based on interviews and observations, that these rituals did indeed appear to bolster the ties between individual practitioners and other Neo-Pagans, creating bonds that often run quite deep. As regards connections with the contemporary Pagan community at large, this strengthening of ties may well lie in the fact that the rituals of the three groups observed were very much in line with “standard” Neo-Pagan concerns at Samhain (such as honouring the dead, banishing negativity, reflecting, and divining), and consequently served to link individuals to other men and women who held rites expressing similar themes. As regards ties with men and women within their own Neo-Pagan group, in all probability, the very matter of having communally experienced what was, by all accounts, an intense, powerful ceremony likely fostered feelings of affinity with fellow ritual participants. Indeed, this appears to be backed up by the observation that not only do many of these groups meet on a regular basis for classes or a variety of rituals, but also that group members do indeed appear to socialize quite regularly with each other outside these settings.

While consideration of Durkheim’s model leads us to see that Neo-Pagan rituals do not reinforce the bonds between the individual and society at large (having, in fact, the opposite effect), and appear to bolster the ties linking men and women with the Neo-Pagan community, we can also assume that for some individuals, these rituals provide the

opposite function: they strengthen celebrants' sense of individuality. Although not focusing on Neo-Paganism, when speaking of new religious movements such as the "Cult of Man" in her *The Complex Forms of the Religious Life*, Westley points out that the community is sometimes seen as transient; interaction is often minimal, and the forging of members into a group is discouraged, as the focus appears to be on individual growth and development.¹³ While this certainly does not appear to be in keeping with the perspective of most of the individuals participating in the present study (most of whom do indeed speak of personal growth, but, significantly, of the importance of community as well, and appear to develop close relationships with each other), it may apply to some of the solitary practitioners who express no interest in formally joining a Neo-Pagan organization. For these men and women, assembling for a Samhain ritual with other Neo-Pagans may have had little to do with fostering a sense of community, and much more to do with utilizing the ritual as a vehicle for personal growth and change.

Consideration of Durkheim's contentions regarding collective effervescence leads us to see that by and large, in the case of all three organizations, a collective ritual did involve many men and women becoming more energized, emotional, and passionate, allowing them to enter a somewhat altered mind frame. Indeed, we recall that many celebrants, when interviewed, spoke of the ritual experience as a powerful one, citing particular elements that were especially moving. An undeniable factor in the matter, however, is the general observation that the men and women participating in each celebration ranged significantly in the degree to which they were committed to the group holding the ritual. A healthy number of individuals, perhaps the majority, were dedicated members of each of the three organizations which staged the rituals; the students at the

school of Paganism met weekly, and the core members of both the university-based society and the province-wide Wiccan organization were a relatively cohesive unit. There were, however, some participants in attendance at the rituals (although not that of the school of Paganism) who partook of the proceedings not with any regularity, and appeared to be in attendance primarily out of curiosity. Individuals falling into the first category likely experienced a “deeper” form of effervescence, one stemming from assembling and worshiping with likeminded people. It is certainly not inconceivable that those in the second category, the curiosity seekers, also felt a “deep” form of effervescence, but these men and women may also have experienced something much more superficial and fleeting, a “transient” high.

The use of Durkheim’s model of ritual as a lens through which to view the markings of the Beltane festival by the groups under study leads us to conclusions similar to those reached when examining Samhain. In revisiting the French scholar’s argument that ritual functions to bolster the link between men and women and their society, we once again note that the rites observed in the current study served instead to distance participants from the dominant culture in some key ways. One of the fundamental motifs of Beltane, the fertility of all things in nature, is not a concept celebrated by the majority of men and women in modern western society.

As regards specifics, we are reminded that the university-based group, the Wiccan organization, and the private coven engaged in Beltane rites such as the celebration of the union of the god and goddess, the divinatory rite of scrying, and the ceremonial planting of seeds from which new life was to spring. These are all practices not performed by the

larger society; by engaging in these rites, Neo-Pagans effectively set themselves apart. This separation may have been temporary in some cases, or more lasting in others.

As was the case with the Samhain ritual, for the same reasons and with the same caveat, we can once again surmise that the rituals of the three groups under study likely functioned to bolster the ties between individuals and the wider Neo-Pagan community. The rituals of each of the groups examined in the current research dealt with themes very much in keeping with standard Neo-Pagan thought, namely a celebration of the fecundity of the natural world and the fertility of the mind. These are established motifs surrounding the Beltane festival, and participation in the rituals under study likely bolstered ties between those who participated in them and individuals who participated in other Beltane rituals that explored the same themes. Once again, as concerns connections with individuals within their own Neo-Pagan organization, having communally experienced an intense, powerful ritual most likely developed a sense of closeness among these men and women. As was noted in regards to the Samhain festival, this contention is backed up by the observation that the individuals involved, by and large, appear to see each other in situations outside of ritual confines, on the social level, relatively often.

Consideration of Westley's argument regarding the use of ritual by some individuals not as a means of fostering community but as a springboard to personal growth and greater individuality offers insights into the Beltane festival just as it did the October 31 festival. As noted earlier, although possession of a single-minded focus on personal development does not appear to characterize most men and women who participated in these rituals, speaking as they did of the value of community and

interpersonal relationships, it may apply to certain solitary practitioners who employed the ritual solely as a means to individual growth and development.

Durkheim's arguments concerning collective effervescence at Beltane illuminate matters in much the same way as they did at Samhain. Once again, we note that a collective assembly was the means for many celebrants to enter into a decidedly different mindset, one characterized by heightened passion, emotion, and energy, a contention backed up by the testimonials of many interviewees concerning the power of the ritual experience. As was remarked when considering the October 31 festival, we must bear in mind that there was great variation in the degree of commitment of participants to the group performing the ritual of which they partook. While all members of the private coven, the students from the university-based society, and the core members of the Wiccan organization were very much devoted to their groups, a certain number of participants in the rituals of the latter two were in attendance primarily out of curiosity. Individuals with a deeper commitment to the group in question, in all probability, experienced a more profound form of effervescence, one coming from engaging in rites with men and women with similar core values; those who were there simply out of a desire to experiment likely experienced something much more shallow and transitory.

We have seen that Emile Durkheim's perspective is a useful lens through which to analyze the rituals considered in the current work. It has provided us with important insights into the seasonal rituals celebrated by Neo-Pagans, one being that a feeling of collective effervescence, profound for some participants and more superficial for others, does appear to exist at these rituals. More importantly, Durkheim's perspective has added nicely to the picture we are forming of the meaningfulness of seasonal rituals for

Neo-Pagans. Similar to what the application of Eliade and Orion's Turner-based model illuminated, we see that the meaningfulness of ritual, for some men and women, is found in the fact that it enables them to express their individuality, and achieve personal growth. Significant is the fact that Durkheim's model also highlights that for others, rituals are meaningful in that they enable individuals to dissent from the dominant culture in some key ways and form their own community, one reflective of their own concerns and needs.

Frederick Bird's Model of Ritual as Communicative Action

As the title suggests, in his "Ritual as Communicative Action," Bird contends that through ritual, men and women communicate a number of meaningful messages both to themselves and to each other. We will begin our consideration of the issue by briefly summarizing the salient points of the article, and will then use it to examine the data collected in the present study.

Bird defines rituals as symbolic acts which are intrinsically valued and usually repeated, ritual actors trying to behave in keeping with the expected characters and roles by using stylized gestures and words.¹⁴ Ritual is scripted, quite like a drama, but nonetheless allows for some extemporaneous "ad-libbing." The roles played by individuals vary, depending on the ritual in question, and actors take on their roles via props, or sometimes actually take on characters.¹⁵ Bird notes that actors in rituals employ not elaborate but restricted codes, using symbols and gestures that carry commonly-assumed meanings.¹⁶ Ritual behaviour imitates models, is conventional and consciously chosen, and is based on scripts; although it may limit the range of expression, ritual nonetheless increases the intensity of expression.¹⁷

Bird states that most scholars employ ideological or functional approaches to the understanding of ritual; respectively, they hold that individuals make sense of rituals by deciphering their messages (a focus on the locutionary aspects of communication), or analyze rituals regarding their social functions (a focus on the perlocutionary dimension of communication).¹⁸ Bird suggests a third strategy: examining rituals in terms of how they channel and facilitate communication among participants (a focus on illocutionary activity created by ritual performance).¹⁹ The focus is on the immediate feelings and representations communicated by ritual, and can be used as a research strategy to shed light on the importance of ritual and how it enables individuals to communicate with themselves and each other at the actual time of the event. This approach assumes that actual ritual performances can be experienced immediately as being meaningful, based on the degree to which they're constitutive, self-representative, expressive, regulative, and invocative.²⁰

First, in constitutive communication, ritual acts bring certain realities into play and announce new conditions in which individuals enjoy a new status.²¹ Second is self-representative communication, unconscious and immediate, in which people, through ritual, represent themselves to themselves, making statements about who they feel they are.²² Third, expressive communication refers to situations in which rituals allow men and women to articulate feelings when they might otherwise be inarticulate, and permit the expression of intense, highly-charged emotion in various contexts when discursive talk is distracting.²³ Next is regulative communication, in which ritual expresses and justifies the moral codes that regulate community life.²⁴ Finally, invocative

communication occurs when rituals bring about desired states of being by invoking gods, spirits, powers, or other sacred realities.²⁵

Bird examines the variation in ritual performance, pointing out that successful rituals depend in part on the expertise of the actors.²⁶ These rituals engage participants, and are voluntary, collective, culturally mandated, and explicable,²⁷ while those which are unsuccessful are, in fact, “ritualisms,” caused by poor performances and omissions, and resemble obsessive behaviour.²⁸ As regards evaluating ritual performances, Bird suggests employing the five dimensions of ritual communication as reference points. Good rituals allow participants to solidify relationships and bring about desired states of mind, experience the ritual as self-acknowledging in relation to the moral (or ideal self), experience and act out intense feelings with others, balance the aesthetic and the moral, and keep sacred realities distant and exclusive, but accessible under certain conditions.²⁹

In focusing on the presence of some form of feasting in many rituals, Bird notes that the serving and eating of food is a communicative activity, not simply a way of consuming sustenance; communal eating reinforces and embodies the communicative aspects of ritual (for example, food in some way represents those who serve it).³⁰ Eating together as a group fosters and consolidates a sense of intimacy, those who eat together virtually constituting a family. Through eating together, individuals establish themselves as particular groups, represent themselves to each other in this manner, and express their sense of relatedness; this kind of communication occurs immediately.³¹

Frederick Bird’s theory of ritual lends itself well to an analysis of the data collected over the course of this research, allowing us to examine the rituals under study and gain insights into the events themselves and the individuals who participated in them;

we will begin with the rituals which marked the Samhain festival. Employing Bird's theory of constitutive communication to consider the October 31 rituals, we see that in marking the festival, each group under consideration was communicating that it constituted an identifiable Neo-Pagan body. The Wiccan organization in particular, for whose founder and key members the achievement of official status was of great importance, was likely announcing its status as a bona fide group through its Samhain ritual. Likewise, though perhaps to a lesser extent, through marking the Samhain festival, the school of Paganism and the university society were transmitting the idea that they constituted distinct Neo-Pagan groups as well.

In the realm of self-representative communication, we recall that the celebrations of the school of Paganism, the university-based society, and the province-wide Wiccan organization all involved rites that honoured the dead; bearing in mind Bird's arguments, we may conclude that the men and women participating in these rituals were representing themselves as individuals who have respect for the deceased, particularly departed ancestors. A number of celebrants, when interviewed, pointedly cited the fact that reverence for elders and forebears is sadly lacking from modern society; many appeared to pride themselves on the fact that they were not similarly without such veneration. They also appeared to be representing themselves as being in touch with nature, as Samhain is a festival rooted in occurrences in the natural world; again, this is a connection not felt by the majority of individuals in the twenty-first century western world. Through communicating these powerful ideas, then, participants may have been expressing a distancing of self from "mainstream" western society as regards their stance on specific issues of great importance.

Using the Canadian scholar's view of ritual as a form of expressive communication, we gain insight into each group's inclusion of rites to acknowledge death and venerate deceased loved ones. We recall that the most striking manner in which all three organizations carried this out was by asking participants to formally recognize, in a very structured manner, the death of a friend or family member. (Other examples of this were when the university-based group performed the spiral dance, symbolizing birth, death, and rebirth, and when that group formally distributed pomegranates, symbolizing death, and apples, representing rebirth.) We conclude that in doing this, group leaders were affording participants the opportunity to communally express a number of highly-charged emotions, primarily the grief associated with death, in their marking of the festival. That this expression took place through the use of stylized ritual forms is not surprising when bearing in mind Bird's argument that discursive talk, when attempting to express intimate, intense feelings (such as confronting the reality of a loved one's death) is distracting. It is important to note that in doing all this, celebrants were once again effectively setting themselves apart, as regards perspectives on death and grieving, from the dominant society, a society in which such communal grieving and the group expression of such profound emotion (outside of the funeral setting) is relatively uncommon and perhaps even taboo.

In the domain of regulative communication, we observe that celebrations of the groups were a means for each to affirm its moral codes. Through participating in group rituals, men and women validated most prominently the Neo-Pagan tenet of honouring the dead and the very concept of death. We have seen that this was done in a variety of manners, including speaking publicly, eating particular foods, the propagating of mythic

lore, and the use of music, dancing, singing, and recitations. Through engaging in these rites, celebrants heard, recognized, and reaffirmed the tenets of Neo-Pagan belief, thereby justifying community mores. Implicit in the affirmation of Neo-Pagan moral codes was a calling into question of some of the values prevalent in the wider society.

Finally, Bird's perspective on invocative communication highlights the fact that the rituals of all the groups invoked gods, goddesses, and elemental powers through the performance of highly stylized acts, in order to make present at the celebrations these remote, sacred realities; this was done both at the beginning of the rituals, and in their interior as well. The obvious importance on summoning sacred realities indicates to us that for these groups, invocation was done as a means of fostering a desired state of being. Members appeared to feel "in the company of the gods" when these often remote realities were called upon for this auspicious occasion. At this important moment, beside the deities in the magic circle, men and women seemed to feel energized and empowered to achieve great things which they would normally be unable to do.

We will now shift our attention to the Beltane festival as marked by the groups under consideration in our study. Examining the May 1 rituals through the lens provided by Bird's theory of constitutive communication, we observe, as was the case with the Samhain ritual, that through celebrating the festival, each group was communicating that it constituted a particular Neo-Pagan organization. The ritual held by the students of the university-based society enabled them to announce their status as an identifiable group, specifically as a class of students exploring contemporary Paganism and searching for the particular pathway which they wished to follow. Once again, the Wiccan group announced its position as a legitimate group through their May 1 celebration. The private

coven clearly communicated through its marking of Beltane that it was a distinct entity, with particular members and dedicants who shared common values and views.

The use of Bird's model of self-representative communication in examining our data concerning the Beltane proceedings leads us to conclude that through their participation in these rituals, individuals represented themselves as men and women who honour "the life force" and the power of fertility, literal and figurative. We recall that the university-based group celebrated new life and inspiration through the physical planting of seeds, the Wiccan organization did so through enacting the union of the god and the goddess, and the private coven accomplished it via gleaning and embracing new inspiration from a need fire. Not unrelated to all this is a representation of self as being connected to nature, as Beltane marks changes taking place in the natural world. As was the case at Samhain, by communicating and embracing these ideas, ideas not held in high regard by most members of the dominant culture, celebrants were turning away from the status quo in key ways, and toward something more personally fulfilling.

Bird's theory of self-representative communication also sheds light on what Beltane ritual participants were saying about themselves on a collective level. It appears that through the performance of Beltane rituals (and the same could be said of those marking Samhain), each group under study in the current research straightforwardly affirmed itself as just that: a group. (This overlaps with the conclusions reached when using Bird's theory of constitutive communication.)

In the realm of expressive communication, we note that in their Beltane rituals, participants conveyed intense joy at the fertility, literal and figurative, which was present in the world around them at that point of the year. In their rituals, on the literal level,

they were expressing jubilation at the coming of spring, the bounty of the land, and the heightened sex drive that occurs in early May. On a figurative level, Neo-Pagans were expressing their authorship of new ideas and the creation of new projects through such acts as making wishes and scrying to gain inspiration from the symbolic union of the god and goddess. Through engaging in these rites, particularly as regards the embracing of the fecundity of spring in the literal sense, participants were again setting themselves apart themselves from the dominant culture, this time in the area of perspectives on fertility and sexuality (as the dominant culture does not embrace and formally celebrate these concepts).

In the realm of regulative communication, as at Samhain, we see that through their rites, each Neo-Pagan group sought to affirm its moral codes, and, on a larger scale, the Neo-Pagan movement in general. We observe that partaking of group festivities at Beltane involved participants actively affirming the Neo-Pagan value of celebrating life (particularly new life), be it in the form of the fecundity of nature or the creative spark of inspiration. Once again, these forms of communication involved in the rituals were designed to serve as models for human interaction and behaviour, thereby justifying the moral codes that regulate Neo-Pagan community life.

Finally, Bird's model of invocative communication underlines the fact that each of the groups under study invoked gods, goddesses, and elemental spirits both in the opening stage of their rituals and the central portion of the Beltane rites as well in order to bring about an altered state of consciousness among celebrants. Interviews indicate that these men and women felt empowered when gods, goddesses, and elemental spirits

were made present upon this auspicious occasion; with these sacred beings beside them in their rites, these individuals felt vitalized and capable of accomplishing great things.

We have established above that in the rituals under study, participants attempted to communicate important, powerful ideas to each other, ideas which indicate some of the ways in which ritual is important to these men and women. In order to obtain a clearer picture of the success with which all of this was done, or the effectiveness with which these ideas were conveyed, we now move to the matter of Bird's distinction between "ritual" and "ritualism" as it applies to the data collected in the present work. Beginning with Samhain, the ritual of the school of Paganism did indeed seem to engage and hold the interest of participants; the men and women in attendance appeared to be very much involved in the proceedings. There appeared to be no omissions, miscues, or unintelligible elements. When interviewed, all those in attendance spoke of how the event was a successful one, citing in particular that it communicated powerful ideas regarding death. The only minor issue of note might be that by their own admission, the two (of four) organizers who were interviewed for the current study were somewhat ill at ease during the ritual; this nervousness, they stated, detracted from the overall experience for them.

The ritual of the university-based organization likewise seemed to actively involve and interest participants; this is not surprising given that it was a teaching ritual, and was thus designed to draw in and inform all those in attendance. Performers in the ritual all remembered their lines, kept things lively, and were very deliberate in everything they did. When celebrants were interviewed later, many cited that the ritual

had been a positive experience, in particular because it communicated powerful ideas regarding death and dying, and solidified community mores as well.

The ritual of the province-wide Wiccan organization appears to have been similarly engaging for participants. The men and women in attendance seemed to be drawn into the proceedings, and did not appear to lose interest in any way during the course of the ritual. The timing was on, the acting appeared to be good, and nothing was forgotten. In fact, all those who were interviewed after the ritual stipulated that it was a success for them, once again in that it conveyed strong ideas concerning the death of loved ones.

As regards the celebrations marking Beltane, the ritual of the university society seemed to actively involve all those in attendance. It was relatively short, to the point, and maintained a lively pace. Participants appeared to be very engaged in what the ritual organizers were leading them through, and maintained a high level of interest. In fact, one of the teachers of the course made a point of saying that he felt the power of the ritual, suggesting that it was a success. As had been the case with the Samhain ritual of the school of Paganism, however, the two (of four) organizers of the ritual who were interviewed cited the fact that nerves somewhat diminished the overall impact of the experience for them.

The Beltane ritual of the Wiccan organization appears to have been engaging to most of the men and women who participated in it as well. All elements were made intelligible to celebrants, there were no omissions, and the proceedings moved along at a good pace. As mentioned earlier, one issue of note which affected the proceedings was the fact that since the ritual was a public one, there was a mixture of serious practitioners

and individuals “off the street,” as it were. It is therefore accurate to say that not all participants were equally “involved” in the ritual; as a ripple effect, some of the more serious celebrants were distracted, and seemed to have a somewhat diminished experience.

The Beltane ritual of the private coven is the only ritual under consideration which was not actually attended by the author of the present work. Given this, it is impossible to evaluate the ritual from empirical observation. Based on interviews with participants, however, it appears that the event was a powerful one for those in attendance. All indications are that it was well-organized, without omissions or miscues, and all that was presented by the organizer was most comprehensible to participants. The ritual’s success seems to lie in the fact that it allowed participants to communicate with sacred realities, an often inaccessible source of power. Indeed, the two celebrants who were interviewed spoke of the messages they received from their personal encounter with the gods in this marking of Beltane.

We now turn our focus to the ways in which Bird’s theory of ritual communication and feasting illuminates the celebrations of the groups considered in the present research. At the outset, it merits stating that so important was the role of communal eating in these rituals that to the mind of the author of this work, the imbibing of food constituted an essential element of the experience, and was not merely an accepted post-ritual rite. We note that in each of the Samhain and Beltane celebrations observed, communal eating took on a communicative function, not merely a survival function; it served to reinforce and embody the communicative elements of the rituals of the Neo-Pagan groups, creating a sense of intimacy for those partaking of the meal. At

each of the rituals observed, as has been noted, during the feasting stage, men and women renewed old friendships and formed new ones; as participants shared a meal, a meal consisting largely of food made and served by celebrants, a certain feeling of closeness seemed to develop (a contention backed up by most participants when interviewed). To varying degrees, depending on the group in question, a sort of “family” unit seemed to be created, as a sense of relatedness among celebrants developed which seemed to be a deep-running one. Eating together went a long way towards enabling each group to identify itself as just that: a distinct, closely-knit, bona fide group. This bolsters our claim that in the realms of constitutive and self-representative communication, these rituals allowed each organization to convey the idea that it constituted a distinct group, and individuals represented themselves as such.

As we conclude our consideration of Frederick Bird’s model of ritual as communicative action, we remark that it has been a most useful filter through which to interpret the data collected in the present work. We have seen that ritual affords men and women the opportunity to communicate with themselves and with each other in profound ways; when considering precisely what the implications of these messages are, one recurring theme appears to be the status of each of these organizations as a legitimate group. Another is the importance placed on transmitting community values to newcomers. Perhaps the most important observation, however, is that in ritual, Neo-Pagans communicate ideas and feelings that indicate a turning away from particular aspects of the dominant culture in certain ways, an insight also indicated by the use of Durkheim’s model of ritual. As we move to the last section of this work, this idea and

others which have emerged over the course of this study will be recapitulated and built upon, leading to final thoughts in a global consideration of the matter at hand.

CONCLUSION

Before carrying out an overall consideration of the ways in which Samhain and Beltane festivals are meaningful to practitioners of Neo-Paganism, we may first consider the following excerpt from scholar of religion Ronald Grimes, as it effectively sums us what is involved in carrying out ritual studies in any tradition.

The roots of ritual are various – human bodies, the environment, cultural traditions, processes. There is no one place at which an interpreter of ritual must begin to study it, because ritual itself has no single origin, and thus no one explanation. Ideally, the study of ritual begins by informed participation in it, and the observation of it.¹

The thrust of Grimes' argument, that ritual has a number of origins as well as a number of explanations, accurately depicts the task which confronted the author of this work at the outset of the research process. Likewise, Grimes' suggestion that actual participation in and observation of ritual is the optimal way of attempting to come to an understanding of it is a consideration that was very much taken into account as the data was collected.

As the investigative process proceeded, another observation of ritual made by Grimes became increasingly clear.

Ritual is one of the oldest human activities – often considered as important as eating, sex, and shelter. Why has it persisted so long? Why does every attempt to suppress it result in creating it anew? What makes ritual seem at once so foundational that even the animals do it and so superfluous that Protestants once imagined that they could dispense with it altogether?²

Indeed, the magnitude and complexity of what this work was trying to comprehend began to stand out most prominently. In each succeeding phase of this research, the importance of ritual as a fundamental human activity surfaced time and time

again; also surfacing was the daunting nature of the task at hand. Given all of the above, the following is an account of the final insights reached in this thesis regarding the importance of Neo-Pagan seasonal rituals to practitioners.

The first matter at hand is a recapitulation of the key points which have been established thus far. In the first section of this thesis, we saw that for the ancient Celts, the festivals of Samhain and Beltane were inextricably linked to changes occurring in nature; on another level, however, the rituals accompanying these holy days spoke to men and women of matters pertaining to living, dying, and one's place in the world. We also observed in the early stages of this thesis that the Neo-Pagan movement, rooted in developments in eighteenth-century Europe and emerging on the world scene in the mid-twentieth century, looked back in many ways to the ancient Celts and their contemporaries, drawing greatly from their spiritual practice for inspiration. Along the way, contemporary Paganism as we know it eclectically borrowed ideas and practices from a number of other sources, among them Freemasonry, high ritual magic, and Theosophy.

In the middle section of this work, we began to formulate some preliminary ideas regarding the ways in which Samhain and Beltane rituals are important to the modern-day Pagans who celebrate them. We noted that the rituals surrounding Samhain in particular appear to be significant in that they involve the veneration of ancestors, divination, reflection, and the elimination of negativity from one's life; the significance of Beltane seems to lie in its focus on the fecundity of nature, as well as its celebration of creativity and inspiration. On a deeper level, we started to remark that it is a lack of fulfillment stemming from "mainstream" religion which often results in men and

women's move to explore Neo-Paganism and its rituals, such as the rites marking Samhain and Beltane. It also began to become clear that Neo-Paganism's offering of the opportunity for personal growth through ritual and the working of magic is important to practitioners. We observed that similarly important is the relative absence of a strict religious hierarchy in Neo-Pagan practice, as followers of Neo-Paganism can lead their own rituals. Also emerging in this section was that an interest in social causes, including environmental and feminist concerns, is another feature of Neo-Paganism's appeal to practitioners, those motifs figuring prominently in Samhain and Beltane rituals. We likewise remarked that although many practitioners of Neo-Paganism are serious in their practice, some are searching and experimenting; while the men and women in the former group likely experience something profound in rituals, those in the latter, in all probability, experience a transient high.

In the final section of this thesis, the use of the four scholarly models of ritual clarified some of the earlier assertions, as these preliminary insights began to crystallize in such a way that we are now able to articulate them as a distinct thesis. Through participating in Samhain and Beltane rituals, men and women attempt to "re-invent" themselves and experience personal development and transformation as they embrace opportunities to begin anew; these rituals are constructed in such a way as to act as a catalyst, the goal of which is to trigger a profound, life-altering psychological response for celebrants, allowing them to gain new perspectives on their lives and the world. On another level, Samhain and Beltane rituals allow individuals to dissent in specific ways from the dominant culture, a culture which, in some key areas, they find unfulfilling and at odds with their a number of their values; these men and women consequently embrace

a community with values reflective of their own. Building upon this succinct account of the meaningfulness of seasonal festivals for Neo-Pagans, what final thoughts can we offer on the matter?

A topic which arose at several points in our research was the matter of men and women using seasonal rituals as a means of exploring alternative spirituality without any serious commitment to the tradition. We noted that for these individuals, the ritual experience is likely not a profound one, and the meaningfulness of ritual to Neo-Pagans as outlined in this work is something they do not come to know. But just how common a phenomenon is this, and what does it say about these individuals? The answer seems to be that regarding commitment to a given group, Neo-Pagans are all across the board. Some individuals commit fully to a particular group, embarking upon a course of rigorous study and practice, partaking of and organizing rituals as part of the process. Other men and women appear to surface and disappear at rituals with surprising frequency. This likely speaks of the fact that the Neo-Pagan movement appeals to a wide variety of individuals. Some of them are men and women with strong spiritual convictions who feel they have “come home” in coming to Neo-Paganism; others are seeking answers to a host of questions, hoping that contemporary Paganism will provide them with the answers and the grounding they are looking for. If it does, they continue their practice; should it not, they choose to move on.

Perhaps most importantly, the implications of one of the primary arguments of this work merit closer investigation. What does it mean to say that Neo-Pagans “dissent from the dominant culture,” and turn to a culture which reflects their own values and concerns? Does this mean that the men and women who follow contemporary Paganism

are marginalized individuals who entirely reject twenty-first century western ways, and are completely at odds with the basic tenets of modern industrialized society? Based on interviews and observation, the answer is a resounding “no.” As is the thrust of this thesis, the men and women encountered over the course of the present research do indeed dissent from a number of “mainstream” societal values in specific ways. We recall comments indicating that a number of contemporary Pagans bemoan the absence of a connection with nature and the lack of the opportunity to formally mourn the dead, among other things, that characterize the modern west. This dissatisfaction, however, and the embracing of an alternate form of spirituality for fulfillment, does not suggest a complete break with the society in which Neo-Pagans live. Despite the obvious differences, the majority of the values held by practitioners appear to be the same as those held by society at large; Neo-Pagans study, work, and love their families in the same manner as do other members of society.

Supporting this idea, we consider an observation made by Margot Adler in her seminal classic *Drawing Down the Moon*, a chronicle of the burgeoning contemporary Pagan movement in the United States. In addressing the matter of her research into what sorts of individuals follow Neo-Paganism, she was to write,

I found every conceivable life style, occupation, and financial position, and I found remarkably diverse political viewpoints.³

Adler has also made reference to the fact that when she circulated her survey to Neo-Pagans in an attempt to chart the nature, size, and growth of the movement, one of the primary issues which respondents wished to clarify concerning the public’s perception of them was that they were normal men and women, fundamentally like everyone else.⁴

A final issue of note is a recognition of one possible limitation of this study: the fundamental argument that seasonal rituals do indeed serve to reinforce the ties between participants and their fellow celebrants, as well as between these men and women and the wider Neo-Pagan community. As was remarked at the time it was made, this contention is based on interviews and observations which were telling, but did not have as their primary intent a reading of the degree to which ritual fostered community. As a final word on the subject, the point that was made is one which I still stand by, despite the lack of research focusing specifically on the issue. It is an area which merits closer investigation by future scholarship, as do many aspects of the Neo-Pagan movement. This thesis has attempted to add in some way to the growing body of scholarly literature on contemporary Paganism; it is hoped that it has succeeded in that endeavour.

ENDNOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹ Loretta Orion, *Never Again the Burning Times: Paganism Revisited* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1995), 5.

² Vivianne Crowley, *Wicca: The Old Religion in the New Millennium* (London: Thorsons, 1996), 1.

³ Graham Harvey, *Contemporary Paganism: Listening People, Speaking Earth* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 133.

⁴ Vivianne Crowley, *Paganism* (London: Thorsons, 2000), 8.

⁵ Crowley, *Wicca*, 90.

CHAPTER 1

¹ Marion Bowman, "Cardiac Celts: Images of the Celts in Paganism," in *Pagan Pathways*, eds. Graham Harvey and Charlotte Hardman (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 243.

² Ibid.

³ Nigel Pennick, *The Sacred World of the Celts* (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1997), 13.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁷ Ibid., 16.

⁸ Peter Berresford Ellis, *A Brief History of the Druids* (London: Constable and Co. Ltd., 1994), 31.

⁹ Pennick, 16.

- ¹⁰ Ronald Hutton, *The Pagan Religions of the British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1991), 177.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 143.
- ¹² J.A. MacCulloch, "The Druids in the Light of Recent Theories," in *The Druid Source Book*, ed. John Matthews (London: Blandford, 1996), 55.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ¹⁵ Jean Markale, *The Druids: Celtic Priests of Nature* (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1999), 58.
- ¹⁶ Strabo, quoted in Pennick, 28.
- ¹⁷ Pliny, quoted in Prudence Jones and Nigel Pennick, *A History of Pagan Europe* (London: Routledge, 1995), 84, 85.
- ¹⁸ Pennick, 28.
- ¹⁹ Pliny, quoted in Jones and Pennick, 84.
- ²⁰ Tacitus, quoted in Barry Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 198.
- ²¹ Cunliffe, 199.
- ²² Markale, *Druids*, 207.
- ²³ Cunliffe, 185, 186.
- ²⁴ Pennick, 71, 72.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ Markale, *Druids*, 164.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 164-168.

- ³⁰ Jean Markale, *The Pagan Mysteries of Hallowe'en* (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 2001), 30.
- ³¹ Leila Dudley Edwards, "Tradition and Ritual: Hallowe'en and Contemporary Paganism," in Harvey and Hardman, 225, 226.
- ³² Jones and Pennick, 90.
- ³³ Caesar, quoted in Markale, *Druids*, 164.
- ³⁴ Markale, *Pagan*, 72.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 74-76.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.
- ³⁷ Markale, *Druids*, 166.
- ³⁸ Edwards in Harvey and Hardman, 226.
- ³⁹ Markale, *Pagan*, 22.
- ⁴⁰ Markale, *Druids*, 165.
- ⁴¹ Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year on Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 360.
- ⁴² Cunliffe, 189.
- ⁴³ Edwards in Harvey and Hardman, 226.
- ⁴⁴ Hutton, *Stations*, 360.
- ⁴⁵ Markale, *Druids*, 166.
- ⁴⁶ Cunliffe, 189.
- ⁴⁷ Markale, *Pagan*, 50, 51.
- ⁴⁸ Markale, *Druids*, 165.
- ⁴⁹ Markale, *Pagan*, 23.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.
- ⁵¹ Markale, *Pagan*, 165.

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⁵⁷ Steve Blamires, *Glamoury: Magic of the Celtic Green World* (St Paul: Llewellyn, 2000), 255.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 252.

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⁶³ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

¹ Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 4.

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³ Ibid., 20, 21.

⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁵ Ibid., 20, 21.

⁶ E.M. Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935): 166, quoted in Hutton, 22.

⁷ *The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. Willard B. Pope (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960): 68, quoted in Hutton, 23.

⁸ Hutton, 25.

⁹ Greg Garrard, "The Romantics' View of Nature," in *Spirit of the Environment: Religion, Value, and Environmental Concern*, eds. David E. Cooper and Joy A. Palmer (London: Routledge, 1998), 117.

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¹⁴ David Stevenson, *The First Freemasons* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988), and *The Origins of Freemasonry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), quoted in Hutton, 52.

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¹⁸ Margaret C. Jacobs, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), quoted in Hutton, 54.

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²⁶ Levi, 29.

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³⁰ Ibid., 78.

³¹ Ibid., 79.

³² Ibid., 82.

³³ Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1991), 401.

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³⁵ Helena Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (Covina: Theosophical University Press, 1889), 50, 51.

³⁶ Ibid., 25.

³⁷ Hutton, 141.

³⁸ Ibid., 139.

³⁹ Ibid., 147.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33.

⁴¹ John Keats, *Endymion*, Book III, II: 141-188, quoted in Hutton, 33.

⁴² Hutton, 34, 36.

⁴³ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 50.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 112.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 117.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 84.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 98.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 101.

⁵¹ Owen Davis, *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003), 185, 186.

⁵² Hutton, 151.

⁵³ Ibid., 155.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁵ W.B. Yeats, "Rose Alchemica," *The Secret Rose* (1897): 244-245, quoted in Hutton, 156.

⁵⁶ Hutton, 162.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 170.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 155, 156.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 166.

⁶¹ Ibid., 174.

⁶² Ibid., 178.

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⁶⁶ Ibid., 17.

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⁷⁰ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 24.

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⁷³ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

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⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 196, 200.

⁸⁰ Tanya Luhrmann, *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 42, 43.

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⁸² *Ibid.*, 214.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁸⁴ Gerald Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Rider & Company, 1954), 125.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 20, 21.

⁸⁶ Hutton, 226.

⁸⁷ Janet Farrar and Stewart Farrar, *A Witches' Bible* (Blaine: Phoenix Publishing Inc., 1981), Part 2: 2.

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⁹² *Ibid.*, 231.

⁹³ Ibid., 232.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 233.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 233, 234.

⁹⁷ Luhrmann, 43.

⁹⁸ Hutton, 233, 234.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 237.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 234.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 237.

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¹⁰³ Ibid., 248.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 239, 249.

¹⁰⁵ Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (New York: Penguin Compass, 1997), 82.

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¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 300.

¹⁰⁸ Sybil Leek, *Diary of a Witch* (New York: Signet, 1968), 35, 36.

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¹¹⁰ Leek, 41.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 46.

¹¹² Ibid., 47.

¹¹³ Hutton, 300, 301.

¹¹⁴ Adler, 95.

¹¹⁵ Farrar and Farrar, Part 2: 245.

¹¹⁶ Hutton, 331.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Adler, 120.

¹²⁰ Hutton, 331.

¹²¹ Ibid., 338.

¹²² Ibid., 339.

¹²³ Ibid., 341, 345.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 345.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 345, 346.

¹²⁶ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 97.

¹²⁷ Hutton, 372.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 388.

CHAPTER 3

¹ All quotations appearing in this chapter are based on interviews conducted by the author of this work. There is a record of these interviews in the author's files. In the body of the text, speakers are referred to parenthetically by a letter indicating the group to which they belong (A: School of Paganism; B: University-based society; C: Province-wide Wiccan organization), a number indicating the person within the group, and the date. In the interest of confidentiality, each interviewee has been given a pseudonym.

CHAPTER 4

¹ All quotations appearing in this chapter are based on interviews conducted by the author of this work. There is a record of these interviews in the author's files. In the body of the text, speakers are referred to parenthetically by a letter indicating the group to which they belong (A: University class; B: Province-wide Wiccan organization; C: Private coven; D: Independent markings of festival), a number indicating the person within the group, and the date. In the interest of confidentiality, each interviewee has been given a pseudonym.

CHAPTER 5

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² Ibid., 4, 22.

³ Ibid., 21.

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⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁷ Ronald Grimes, *Readings in Ritual Studies* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1996), 194.

⁸ Eliade, 52.

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¹² Ibid., 62.

¹³ Ibid., 35.

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¹⁵ Ibid., 68.

¹⁶ Ibid., 69.

¹⁷ Ibid., 158.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

²⁰ Loretta Orion, *Never Again the Burning Times: Paganism Revisited* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1995), 147.

²¹ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969).

²² Ibid., 95.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 95, 96.

²⁶ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 44.

²⁷ Ibid.

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³⁰ Ibid.

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³² Ibid., 148.

³³ Ibid., 148, 287.

³⁴ Ibid., 148.

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CHAPTER 6

¹ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1915), 226.

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⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Frances Westley, *The Complex Forms of the Religious Life: A Durkheimian View of New Religious Movements* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 4.

⁷ *Ibid.*

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⁹ Durkheim, 215.

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¹¹ Lukes, 463.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Westley, 45, 46.

¹⁴ Frederick Bird, "Ritual as Communicative Action," in *Ritual and Ethnic Identity*, eds. Jack Lightstone and Frederick Bird (Wilfred Laurier Press, 1995), 23.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26, 27.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Ibid., 28.

²² Ibid., 30.

²³ Ibid., 31, 32.

²⁴ Ibid., 35.

²⁵ Ibid., 36.

²⁶ Ibid., 41.

²⁷ Ibid., 44.

²⁸ Ibid., 43.

²⁹ Ibid., 45-47.

³⁰ Ibid., 38.

³¹ Ibid., 38, 39.

CONCLUSION

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² Ibid, xiii.

³ Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America Today* (New York: Penguin Compass, 1997), 382.

⁴ Ibid., 453.

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